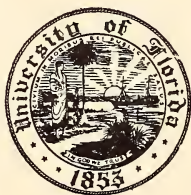



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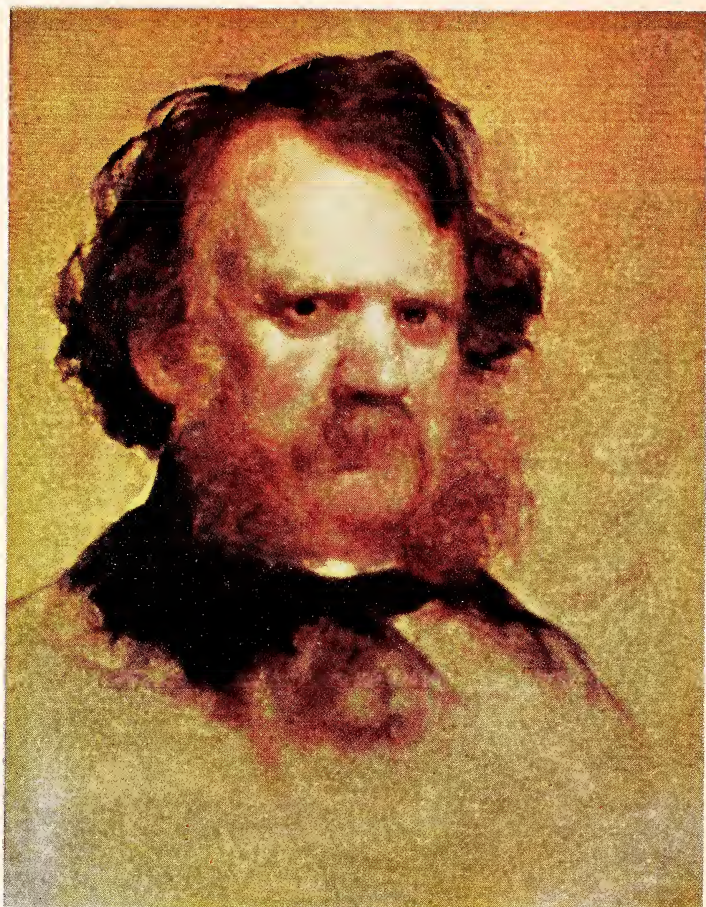


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Thomas Bangs Thorpe



Courtesy Mrs. William S. Fulton
THOMAS BANGS THORPE,
painted by Charles Loring Elliott.



MILTON RICKELS

Thomas Bangs Thorpe

Humorist of the Old Southwest

Baton Rouge • 1962
Louisiana State University Press

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For Patricia and Gordon

Preface

TO DISCOVER THE WORK LEFT BY SO VERSATILE A MINOR figure as Thomas Bangs Thorpe is a long task and an impossible one without the help of many others. Indeed, learning of the amiable generosity of the scholarly world is one of the pleasant rewards of the beginning biographer. The project of locating the published work of a writer when there are but few hints of where it might appear, of discovering letters which are still extant, of finding paintings scattered by time is so complex that this study cannot hope to present Thomas Bangs Thorpe as fully as he might be presented if time allowed the location of all such material. Yet the minor figure ought to be served with only one biography. Consequently the knowledge that I have left possible sources of information still unexplored is doubly embarrassing.

Whatever completeness this biography has, owes so much to the help of others that acknowledgment to all who deserve thanks is impossible. I was helped not only by specialists in American literature and American studies but also by historians, students of American art and its history, and many others interested in the small change as well as the currency of American culture. Some help can not be

classified exactly: Jeanne and Hal Rakowski did some genealogical research by exploring New York cemeteries for me. The following acknowledgments will merely suggest the extent of my indebtedness to the many others who assisted me.

First, my thanks to Dr. Arlin Turner, now of Duke University, who as my advisor in the doctoral program at Louisiana State University, suggested the possible usefulness of a biography of Thorpe and told me how to go about my work. Other members of my committee who read drafts of the study and helped with suggestions include Dr. Thomas A. Kirby, Dr. Henry Bosley Woolf, Dr. Lewis P. Simpson, and Dr. Edwin Adams Davis. Members of the library staff at Louisiana State University were unfailingly helpful, and my gratitude is due especially to Dr. V. L. Bedsole, Head of the Department of Archives, for help in locating out-of-the-way material and for permission to quote from Thorpe's earliest extant letters, and to Miss Marcelle F. Schertz, Reference Archivist.

Dr. Walter Blair and Mr. Franklin J. Meine were courteously helpful with their suggestions. Dr. Norris Yates provided me with copies of letters referring to Thorpe as he uncovered them in his research for his *William T. Porter and the Spirit of the Times*. His bibliographical essay to the volume is a model of lucid guidance to research in the regional writing that appeared in the old New York *Spirit of the Times*, where Thorpe's work was first published.

Dr. George M. Dutcher examined the scattered materials of Wesleyan University's first years for information about Thorpe's college career. Mrs. Edward Everett Thorpe answered many questions about the Thorpe family genealogy. Esther Clark Wright of Ottawa summarized her material on the Thorpes in Canada before the publication of her book, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick*.

Editor Charles E. Baker and Assistant Editor David H. Wallace of the New-York Historical Society answered many

questions and gave permission to quote from the society's holdings of Thorpe letters, as did R. N. Williams, II, Director, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Milton Edward Lord, Director, the Boston Public Library, and Robert W. Hill of the New York Public Library.

My bibliography of Thorpe's work first appeared in *American Literature* and is here reprinted, with the addition of "The Squatter's Wife," 1846, by the kind permission of the editors.

The staff of the National Archives and Records Service, the Library of Congress, and the Los Angeles Public Library helped in locating material, as did Mr. Garland F. Taylor of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University and Mr. John Hall Jacobs, Librarian, the New Orleans Public Library.

The locating of pictures is a difficult task, and many individuals and the directors of many galleries, public and private, have answered my letters courteously. My particular thanks are due to Miss Mary Bartlett Cowdrey of the Archives of American Art who helped me with the National Academy of Design Exhibition Records. Dr. George C. Groce outlined some very helpful methods of procedure.

The colored frontispiece of this volume is made possible by the generosity of Mrs. William Shirley Fulton of the Double F Ranch, Dragoon, Arizona. This portrait of Thorpe, unfinished and unsigned, is ascribed by family tradition to Charles Loring Elliott, Thorpe's lifelong friend. The second portrait of Thorpe included, which shows him as a younger man, may also be by Elliott. The portrait of Zachary Taylor, one of several Thorpe painted, is unsigned, but is ascribed to Thorpe by family tradition. All three of these portraits were furnished by Mrs. Fulton.

Mr. and Mrs. Ray Samuel of New Orleans own the lithograph of the cotton plant, which Thorpe dedicated to the cotton planters of Louisiana, and the still life which is the earliest example of Thorpe's painting included in this

volume. It is signed "T. B. Thorp/1839." Mr. Albert Lieutaud of New Orleans furnished me with photographs of this still life and with a detail of the signature. The picture of Niagara by Thorpe is reproduced through the courtesy of Mr. S. Morton Vose of Boston.

For the provision of secretarial help and for kindly encouragement my thanks are due Dr. E. V. Pullias of the University of Southern California, Dr. Wade Ruby of George Pepperdine College, and Dr. Mary E. Dichmann of the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Dr. Frank T. Meriwether and Miss Claire Ohlinger read the entire manuscript and carefully listed suggested corrections.

To my wife, Dr. Patricia Kennedy Rickels, I owe more than thanks. My acknowledgment of her help will be most incomplete. She took time from her own research to help with mine, improved many sentences, checked matters of form, prepared the index, and in short contributed skillful help as well as love and patience.

MILTON RICKELS

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Backgrounds for an American Artist

THOMAS BANGS THORPE IS REMEMBERED TODAY IN AMERICAN literature among the humorists of the Old Southwest, together with Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson Jones Hooper, and George Washington Harris. Of the group, Thorpe was the keenest observer of his times, the most productive writer, perhaps the most complex and interesting figure. He was both painter and writer, and his period of greatest activity came in the hectic 1840's and 1850's, when he was the best known of the humorists and realists of the Southwest. He helped to create and to form America's first realistic tradition of any scope, but his interest sprang immediately from his own romantic quest for the character of the Western frontiersman. He was one of the many minor figures—artists and editors, politicians and writers—who helped to provide the symbols and patterns of a national character.

When Thomas Bangs Thorpe was born in 1815, his forebears had lived on the American continent for almost two

centuries. The first Thorpe (Thorp as it was usually spelled) of the New World was William, a weaver by trade, who had come to New Haven, Connecticut, before 1639, bond servant, perhaps as a political prisoner, to John Johnson. William Thorp was a man of some education, for he could read and write well, and one of his duties was to keep the accounts of the Johnsons.¹

From William Thorp the line descended through the sober, prosperous middle-class generations: John, Samuel, and another Samuel whose son Elisha, born in 1749, married Sarah Wakeman just before the outbreak of the American Revolution. Elisha remained a Loyalist, and was eventually forced to flee to Lloyd's Neck, Long Island, where the British evacuated those families which did not join the revolutionaries. Here in 1782 he signed a petition to go to Nova Scotia, and was named in the grant of Oak Point, Kings County, New Brunswick, in 1783. In the spring or summer of the year he, his wife Sarah, and their children sailed to what was to become the province of New Brunswick in one of the two fleets that carried the Connecticut Tories out of the clutches of their neighbors.²

By 1785 Elisha Thorp was admitted as freeman of St. John, New Brunswick, where he was an innkeeper. Here in 1792 Thomas, the fifth son of seven children, was born. This Thomas Thorp was to be the father of Thomas Bangs Thorpe.

Within a few years Elisha, the Tory, died, and Sarah Wakeman Thorp grew lonely for her parents and friends in Connecticut. Apparently about 1800 she and her children returned to the United States to live at Weston, Connecticut.

¹ Donald Lines Jacobus, *History and Genealogy of the Families of Old Fairfield* (New Haven, Conn., 1930), *passim*. I am also indebted to Mrs. Edward Everett Thorpe of New York for information about the Thorpes in America.

² For information about Elisha Thorp I am indebted to Dr. Esther Clark Wright of Ottawa, Canada.

Meanwhile, the followers of John Wesley were making of Methodism a powerful force in the United States. One of their earliest areas of activity was the country lying between the Hudson and Connecticut rivers. Sometime during his adolescence, Thomas Thorp listened to the passionate and zealous preaching of the circuit riders as they moved through the little towns, holding meetings wherever space afforded. When he was 16, according to the language of the *Minutes* of the church for 1819, "he was awakened and converted under the preaching of the Methodists, and soon united himself with them in church fellowship."

Intelligent and sincere, he was shortly caught up even more closely in the passionate movement and began to preach. He was licensed as a local preacher in 1811 at the age of 19. In 1812, at the New York Annual Conference presided over by Francis Asbury, Thomas Thorp, twenty years old, was admitted on trial and given his first appointment to the traveling ministry in the Granville Circuit. For the year 1814-1815 he was assigned to the Litchfield Circuit, which covered the northeastern part of Litchfield County, Connecticut, and an adjacent part of southern Massachusetts, extending north perhaps as far as Westfield.

Meanwhile Thomas Thorp had met and married Rebecca Farnham of West Springfield, Massachusetts,³ who nursed him through the long periods of his illness, for he was slowly dying of tuberculosis. In 1813 he was ill most of the time but managed to cover much of his Westmoreland Circuit nonetheless; however, in 1814, because he was unable to sustain the long rides through his circuit, he preached mostly at Goshen, in Connecticut. While he was confined to his bed, he continued to read and study, gaining a reputation among a clergy more active than contemplative as one outstanding for his diligence and learning.

Thomas Bangs Thorpe, the first son of Thomas and

³ Timothy Hopkins, *Kelloggs in the Old World and the New* (3 vols.; San Francisco, 1903), II, 1127.

Rebecca Thorp, was born at Westfield, Massachusetts, on March 1, 1815. The presiding elder of the district at the time was Nathan Bangs, who may well have officiated at the baptism, and no doubt from him the infant received his middle name. The following years brought a series of moves from one circuit to another for the Reverend Thomas Thorp and his family: he was stationed at Middletown, Connecticut, in 1816; then in New Haven; and in 1818 in New York. By this year another child had been born to the young couple, a daughter, Alice.

In New York the family settled in a house on Delancey Street near Orchard. From here Thomas Thorp served principally the Allen Street Church.⁴ Five other ministers were assigned to the city. They rotated from church to church, seldom preaching twice in one day to the same congregation. Frail and zealous, Thomas Thorp added to the burdens of his ministry by beginning to write, but his health grew steadily worse, and it became apparent that he could not recover from his illness. In November of 1818 he completed his will, leaving the land he owned in Fairfield to his mother. Strange to our age, he made no mention of his wife, who was pregnant at the time with another child, or of his son and daughter. January 18, 1819, he died of tuberculosis, a few days before the birth of his next son, Richard Henry Sackville Thorp.

For a while Rebecca Thorp and her family remained in New York at the Delancey Street address, but within a few months she moved to Albany to live with her parents. Joel Farnham, her father, was a whipmaker by trade. Here, in the home of his grandparents, young Thomas Bangs Thorpe spent most of the 1820's. By the time his mother and the family came to live with the Farnhams, he was almost ready to start school. In all probability he attended the public schools in the city, for the state had a good system, organized

⁴Samuel A. Seaman, *Annals of New York City Methodism, 1766-1890* (New York, 1892), 207-208.

as early as 1795 when the legislature passed an act to maintain schools "in which the children of the inhabitants residing in the State shall be instructed in the English language or be taught English grammar, arithmetic, mathematics, and such branches of knowledge as are most useful and necessary to complete a good English education."

As an adult, Thorpe recalled his school days with pleasure, writing for the *Knickerbocker Magazine* in 1841:

The school-house where I whiled away many a year grew dark at evening sunset in the forked shadow of the old "VANDERHEYDEN PALACE." That venerable building was as romantic as any castle ever built on the rolling Zuyder-Zee. . . . I loved that old house, for the descendants of Vanderheyden occupied it in my day; and between school hours I used to romp through its old halls and climb into its dusty garrets, with sensations little short of those Galileo felt, when he swept his telescope for the first time across the heavens.

He and his schoolmates came often to play with little Marie Vanderheyden in the blue-ceilinged rooms of the ancient Holland brick house, already a hundred years old.

The marks of Dutch civilization were everywhere in Albany during Thorpe's school years: Dutch taverns, Dutch costumes, and Dutch-built houses—white and yellow, with high-peaked roofs, gable ends, and weathercocks. These were becoming rarer, however, and in 1833, when the old Vanderheyden house was demolished, Washington Irving carried off the weathervane to Sunnyside, for such things were beginning to be antique curiosities. On the walls of rooms where cleanliness was a vice, fat little Thomas Thorpe saw paintings by the old Dutch masters: at Mynheer Vanderschuyven's he saw three oils by Teniers, his child's mind registering momentarily the clear blue sky and solid groups of trunk-breeched Dutchmen.⁵ Such sights were a part of his first essay into public life, when he went about from house to house wishing the good citizens and neigh-

⁵ T. B. Thorpe, "Old Dutch Houses and Their Associations," *The Knickerbocker*, XVIII (August, 1841), 154.

bors a happy New Year, collecting gifts of cakes for his infant insincerity.

However, Dutch paintings and Dutch pastries were but momentary interludes in the sparer Yankee life of Farnhams and Thorps. Tradition has it that, when he was not quite seven, he gave testimony in a suit where Dr. Peter Van Olinda was plaintiff. To test his reliability as a witness, he was asked if he knew what would happen to him if he told a lie. He promptly answered that he would "go to hell," thus testifying to the rigor of his religious training.⁶

Other members of the family helped Rebecca Thorp and her children as they could. Henry Sackville, Thomas' brother, went to live with his uncle and aunt, the William Sherwoods, and Thomas Bangs spent the long summers of his childhood in Connecticut with his paternal grandmother, Sarah Wakeman Thorp, widow of the Royalist Elisha. Vacations in the country were an agreeable novelty for the child, and in a sketch written for the *Spirit of the Times* in 1841 he recalled some of the delights of such excursions:

Our old grandmother was our favorite, and after saluting us with the warmest embrace and expressing unbounded astonishment at the surprising manner we had grown the year last past, she would stuff our pockets with cookies and sweetmeats and then give us the important office while staying with her, of "taking care of the chickens."

In his later writings, childhood recollections are few, but without exception they express the memory of a pleasant and happy time.

2

Shortly after the mid-1820's, Rebecca Thorp and her family left Albany and sailed down the Hudson to live once more in New York City. By May of 1827, when the young

⁶ Joel Munsell (ed.), *Annals of Albany* (New York, 1859), February 12, 1859.

men employed by Longworth the publisher began calling at each home to list the households for the New York City Directory, the Thorps were settled at 46 Rivington. Thomas Bangs was twelve years old that spring, and Henry Sackville, the youngest member of the family, just past eight.

Here in New York young Thomas Bangs Thorpe finished his education. The city was already growing into a metropolis: between 1820 and 1830 the population increased over one-third, to 178,000 persons. Slavery had been abolished by the latter year, and more varied racial and religious groupings inhabited the city than any other on the Atlantic seaboard. When Dr. John W. Francis, the city's indefatigable antiquarian, published his account of New York and its institutions in 1832 in *Brewster's Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, the city had 123 churches, including synagogues of Portuguese and German Jews, the Dutch Reformed Church, and churches of the Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist and other faiths.

The appearance of the city, variously described according to the point of view and temperament of its visitors, apparently was not unpleasing. Hogs still scavenged in the alleys, but fewer here than in Albany. The streets were poorly paved—morasses of mud in winter, fields of dust in summer, but Broadway, three miles long, was a wide avenue with smooth sidewalks before the handsome stores. City Hall was considered one of the most beautiful buildings in America, and the architects—McComb, Stanton, and Brady—were busy from 1790 to 1820 designing fine homes for the wealthy merchants of the city. Duncan Phyfe kept his shop and store-rooms, sending out his slenderly elegant chairs, sofas, and dining tables to furnish the halls of the great merchant princes. Gourlay, Levy, and Harrison sold paintings, mostly European imports. The city harbored two art academies, both offensive to the pious, and a lusty theater provided delight, instruction, and occasion for riot.

Thorpe's own circle of friends was more or less confined

to the simpler Methodist acquaintances of his family, sober people often suspicious of the cultural sophistications of the worldly. The house on Rivington was far removed from the luxury of State Street, but still the city provided any young boy varied and stimulating sights with its streets and buildings—and the population was full of the restless ferment of a youthful republic.

In New York Thorpe spent the early and middle years of his adolescence finishing his primary education. For a while he lived at Ballston Spa and tramped the wild forests around Saratoga Lake.⁷ He knew the scenery of the Hudson, and the pictorial writing of Washington Irving (he said he knew the *Sketch Book* and *Knickerbocker's History* by heart)⁸ was teaching him to see the wild and the picturesque as the English Romantics saw their own countryside.

But his schoolboy days were drawing to a close, and the time approached for him to choose his career. His interests, as they were beginning to form, were artistic and literary, and eventually he decided, admirably and impractically, to become a historical painter.⁹

About 1830 he set out for the studio of John Quidor because, he said, Quidor was the only avowed figure painter in New York and possibly, except Washington Allston, the only one in the country.¹⁰

Both John Trumbull and Benjamin West had painted historical scenes before Thorpe's time, and their work was considered a noble and dignified art, particularly acceptable to a young republic ready to establish the traditions of its heroes and its history. Perhaps Thorpe's choice of the 29-year-old Quidor also grew from the practical consideration that Quidor was relatively without reputation, known

⁷ Manuscript Biography in the Griswold Collection, Boston Public Library.

⁸ T. B. Thorpe, *Reminiscences of C. L. Elliott* (New York, 1868), 4.

⁹ Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Prose Writers of America* (3d ed., Philadelphia, 1849), 546.

¹⁰ Thorpe, *Reminiscences of C. L. Elliott*, 3.

merely as a painter of designs for the panels of fire engines. Such an unknown might be willing to accept on reasonable terms a boy of limited financial resources. However, his choice could not have been better, for Quidor was a curious and independent genius and a brilliant technician.

A few years earlier Quidor himself had been a fellow pupil with Henry Inman under John Wesley Jarvis, the inappropriate nephew of the founder of Methodism. Jarvis was a man of lusty tastes, a Rabelaisian trencherman, a brilliant storyteller, and a public scandal for what William Dunlap, historian of American artists in 1834, called his "mysterious marriages"—an arrangement, perhaps a prerequisite, he found satisfying to contract with each new little female he used as a model. But Quidor went far beyond Jarvis' satisfying and solid competency to create his own highly individual and poetic genre. Sentiment and even sentimentality were becoming increasingly essential to success in painting, but Quidor, painting his fire engines to support himself, followed his own bent to paint—in rough, glittering touches—brilliant fantasies and caricatures inspired by Washington Irving's tales. His misty pictures arose not from the observation of nature but rather out of an idea.¹¹

In the light of Thorpe's later work, both his painting and his literary efforts, two of Quidor's characteristics are worth noting. First, his unconventionality and independence of the demands of prevailing taste set him apart, for he was willing to paint his fire engines in obscurity so that he could continue his own work as he chose. Next, his eye for the comic and his discovery of Irving as a source of inspiration for painting were to be repeated in the work of his pupil Thorpe.

At Quidor's shop (it could scarcely be called a studio), located in the second story of a building on Pearl Street,

¹¹ Alan Burroughs, *Limners and Likenesses* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), 153-54. See also John Baur, *John Quidor* (Brooklyn, 1942).

Thorpe met another young man who had come on the same errand as he—to study with Quidor. This young man, Charles Loring Elliott, later to have the reputation as one of the best portrait painters of his age, was not quite 18, three years older than Thorpe, slender, delicate, with bright, small, dark eyes. “Youthful, imaginative, and unsophisticated,” Thorpe wrote later at his lifelong friend’s death, “we entered at once into hearty and unrestrained conversation.”¹²

Quidor was not at home, and the two young men looked about in timid wonder at the chaos of his rooms—a primitively ancient coat of dust lay undisturbed on window sills and mantelpieces, the floor was broken and dirty, a long bench and two or three dilapidated chairs composed the furniture. “A rudely constructed easel, however, was near one of the north windows, on the pegs of which rested a picture that called forth our unbounded enthusiasm and admiration. It was the first oil painting of any merit that we had ever seen. It represented Ichabod Crane fleeing from the headless horseman.” Both of the young men knew Irving’s work intimately, and Quidor’s grotesque and fantastic concept of Ichabod and his horse was a revelation of what the mind and hand of art could create.

The excitement of the first impression of Quidor’s brilliant work over, Elliott opened a neatly covered package he had held tightly under his arm and showed young Thorpe two of his own pictures—one an illustration of Peter Stuyvesant’s hardest fought battle, and the other a portrait of a clergyman, cabinet size, dressed in robes. The latter, a neat little picture done with painful care, looked exactly like the colored mezzotint engraving from which it was copied. The battle picture contained a good many figures and was full of humor. Talking enthusiastically of art and more formally of their own lofty ambitions, the young men found

¹² Thorpe, *Reminiscences of C. L. Elliott*, 3. The following discussion of Thorpe’s art training is based on this pamphlet.

themselves more and more agreeable to each other. Alike in their sunny dispositions and kindliness, they formed a friendship that "lasted uninterrupted and shadowless for nearly forty years."

In the many months that followed, Thorpe and Elliott worked together in Quidor's rooms. Of his training, Thorpe later remembered only that his teacher gave him easel room and some common engravings to copy. Quidor also absented himself from his studio for days and sometimes weeks at a time. When present, if not painting on a banner or engine back, he would generally lie at full length on the long bench that adorned one side of his room and which served him for a bed when he felt indisposed to go to his home near Corlaer's Hook. From this vantage point he would comment on the work of his young pupils.

A frequent visitor to Quidor's rooms was the sculptor John Henry Isaac Browere, who had his "plaster factory," as he called it, in a long, uncouth-looking building at the corner of Center and Pearl streets. The man was a giant in his physique and fond of telling the boys "the particulars about his nearly strangling Jefferson to death when he took a plaster cast of that immortal statesman's face." Indeed, the newspapers of the time had attacked Browere for the rumored rough treatment of the aged Jefferson, but he had maintained stoutly that his own method, which he had invented himself, was easier for the subject than the usual process, and he even succeeded in obtaining from Jefferson an indorsement of his mode. "And he delighted," wrote Thorpe, "to make the hair on our heads stand on end with the horrible details connected with his digging up the corpse of Hicks, the Unitarian Quaker, for the sake of securing a mask of the face; and he ended off with terrible imprecations upon the heads of those who interrupted him in his artistic work," which was really a noble project to complete a gallery of eminent Americans.

Browere's violent language was both terrifying and

fascinating to the two boys, perhaps to Thorpe particularly, with his background of simple living and mild speech. Sometimes the eccentric Browere would strip himself like a boxer to show the muscles of his chest, shoulders, "and what he called the torso of the fighting gladiator and Hercules in repose; all of which struck our unsophisticated minds as illustrating 'high art.' "

When the boys were not at Quidor's working at their copying, they wandered about the city, admiring the majestic trees in front of the old City Hospital on Pearl Street, drinking the brackish water at the pump which stood opposite the entrance, and idling across the street in the store of the Yankee Chapin, who sold stationery and music. To see the work of European painters, they attended Levy's weekly sales. Scriptural subjects were conventionally popular, and young Thorpe felt Europe was surely being ransacked for the trade; but "Levy in his humor had many pleasant and some profane things to say when he left the Abrahams and the Isaacs to descant upon Characters peculiar to the Christian era." At Levy's Thorpe and Elliott became acquainted with Michael Paff, the picture cleaner, and with Coleman [probably William Coleman], who sold fine books and choice engravings. At Coleman's invitation the two visited his store on Broadway, "and there for the first time," wrote Thorpe, "saw real works of art."

Meanwhile Quidor's two students were producing picture after picture under his direction; for if he failed to trouble himself over the methodology of his pedagogy, he did keep his charges busy at the task they were learning. As their stock grew, Thorpe and Elliott began to hope that their fortune, too, might increase, so they approached Levy and asked him if he would not include two or three of their moderns in one of his sales. He treated the request with easy good humor, honestly willing to help if he could. At the next auction, then, after he had disposed of his usual material in large style, he turned to the few

pictures Thorpe and Elliott had carefully chosen from their past months' production.

"Now," said the auctioneer, "I have the pleasure of giving you some American productions—the glimmering of the genius of our own land breaking out in effulgence from behind the dark clouds of European art."

The professional bidders, after expressing their disdain for the work, began to bid jestingly at fifty cents, and finally the pictures were handed down at seventy-five.

The next day Thorpe and Elliott called for the proceeds of the sale. Levy paid them, refusing any commission for himself, and advised them seriously that, if they really wanted to make money from their work, they should paint rather indefinitely and then darken the pictures with varnish. The tastes of the buyers were formed on the drawing and composition of the Europeans of the preceding generation and on coloring which was the result of time and preservatives.

After a year or more, Elliott decided to seek the advice of several prominent men in the city in order to advance in his career. He told his friend, young Thorpe, of his plan, and the two went together, first to the home of Dr. David Hosack, physician, professor of *materia medica* at Columbia and one of the founders in 1808 of the American Academy of Fine Arts. "His house," said Dr. Francis, once his pupil and later his partner, "was the resort of the learned and the enlightened," adding that DeWitt Clinton, Bishop John Henry Hobart, and Dr. Hosack "were the tripod upon which our city stood." Thorpe, about 17 at the time, remembered Hosack's home as a large mansion, its floors covered with fine matting and rich rugs. The doctor received them with kindly courtesy, advised them wisely that industry and self-reliance were the secrets of success, and, best of all, showed them his own collection of pictures. When they left he gave them a note to the Clerk of the Common Council,

City Hall, directing that the two young men be allowed to visit the Governor's Room to see the collection of portraits of warriors and statesmen there.

The two then went to the studios on Courtland Street where Samuel Waldo and William Jewett had long worked amiably together as portrait painters. After the venerable-looking Waldo had examined specimens of Elliott's work, he told him he painted well enough to deserve business: "I would advise you to go down to the Fulton Street market," he continued, "(the butchers are the most liberal and independent, and finest looking of any class of our citizens) and select one you see whose face pleases you, introduce yourself, and tell him your business. . . . Ninety-nine chances in a hundred he will meet your wishes in a friendly spirit and grant your request. If the picture is a success, you will be well paid for your trouble and secure a friend who will get you commissions."

After the visit to Waldo, the two continued to the American Academy building to see Colonel Trumbull, who, interrupted at his work, was coldly polite. Thorpe and Elliott left shortly, filled after their day's calls with the thin but exhilarating air of good advice. Elliott returned to the country for a while, and Thorpe continued his work in New York.

By 1833 Thorpe had his first picture ready for exhibition at the American Academy of Fine Arts. Newspaper tradition of 1840, printed first in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* and repeated in the New York *Spirit of the Times*, had it that the picture was titled the *Bold Dragoon*, from Irving's sketch of the same name, that Colonel Trumbull praised it highly, and that Washington Irving's brother, Judge John Treat Irving of the Court of Common Pleas, purchased it. Records of The National Academy of Design, however, indicate that the title of the picture Thorpe exhibited in 1833 was *Ichabod Crane*. The subtitle read, quoting from Irving, "And now the sound of music from

the common room, or hall, summoned to the dance. Ichabod prided himself on his dancing." Whatever the title, the picture seems to have been a genre piece, probably humorous, drawing its inspiration, like many of Quidor's compositions, from the writing of Washington Irving. It is worth recalling that Irving's work is imaginative, that some of his scenes and characters represent American places and types, and that many of his sketches are humorous. And Thorpe was from the beginning of his career to depend on the humorous, the local, and the imaginative for some of his best achievements, both literary and artistic. Further, while Irving wrote of picturesque scenery and grotesque characters, his literary style is highly sophisticated, showing a great deal of polish and elegance. Finally, his smooth and graceful expression was a part of his way of regarding his material, a kind of easy urbanity in his mode of address to his subject matter. He was never a part of the legends he recounted, but always the good-humored and urbane gentleman observer, a point of view to be echoed to a degree in Thorpe's later sketches.

3

Meanwhile, probably early in 1832, Thorpe's mother remarried. Rebecca Thorp's second husband was Charles Albert Hinckley, who had been born in Hallowell, Maine, in 1792.¹³ Hinckley was a bookbinder and gilder, a trade with some relation to the worlds of literature and art. In January, 1833, a daughter was born to the couple and named Rebecca Thorp Hinckley. Also in 1833, the year Thorpe exhibited his first picture at the American Academy, he listed himself in the New York City Directory as a portrait painter at the same address with his stepfather.

The encouragement of exhibition at the Academy, together with the praises his pictures were receiving, made him

¹³ Hopkins, *Kelloggs in the Old World and the New*, II, 1127.

eager to go on with his studies beyond what Quidor and New York had to offer. This, of course, meant a trip to Europe. He had hopes, for a while at least, that the money would be forthcoming from some source, but neither his family nor his friends could support him in residence abroad. When it became clear that he could not go, he was bitterly disappointed.¹⁴ Instead, it was decided that he would enroll at Wesleyan University, but as far as young Thomas Bangs Thorpe was concerned, the college education was a dismal second choice.

Still, it was a change of direction not without possibilities, for the vision Thorpe at 17 and 18 was beginning to form of his life's achievement was the image of himself as an artist, but not as a bohemian; on the contrary, his guiding concept, still vague and half-formed, was of himself as the gentleman-artist. Artistic ability was proper to the gentleman of feeling, who was distinguished sometimes by his achievement, always by his conduct, and who was of necessity financially independent. Thorpe's family could not provide him an income, so he himself must achieve a competency, if not a fortune (all things were possible in America); and while the professions one prepared for in college—the ministry, teaching, the law—were not wholly satisfactory, even so the education was desirable.

¹⁴ Griswold MS.

CHAPTER TWO

Wesleyan University, *1834—1836*

IN THE FALL OF 1834 WHEN THORPE, JUST PAST 19, ARRIVED at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, he was accepted immediately into the intimate society of the little college. The family ties had continued close with the Methodist church, and perhaps, too, Nathan Bangs was expressing his will and lending his assistance in the education of his namesake, for Bangs was a powerful leader in the conference and in the college.

Thorpe was at once elected to membership in the Peithologian Society, one of the three debating clubs of the college, numbering among its membership Aaron Coke Bangs and Edward W. Bangs, the latter the son of Nathan Bangs. The club members also chose Thorpe to deliver an address before the student body on the aims and functions of the society and the consequent advantages of membership in it, perhaps a tribute to his intelligence and promise as a speaker.¹

¹ Professor George M. Dutcher, retired, most generously examined the records of Thorpe's activities at Wesleyan.

He settled himself in a room at the college dormitory, where the rent was \$3.00 a term, and made arrangements to eat at the commons, later to complain of the food as college students are wont to do. Some of the boys lived with private families in town, who charged \$1.50 a week, and still others boarded themselves on one-half this, living "chiefly on a milk and vegetable diet," which they found "conducive to Health."²

During his first few days Thorpe had time to stroll through the little village of Middletown, which was already 180 years old, thrifty, smug, and pious, with muddy streets, frame houses, and a few brick public buildings.³ Some of the townspeople engaged in the manufacture of woolen goods and machinery; and the ships of Portland, then called Chatham, lying across the Connecticut River, sailed the seven seas under Yankee captains, but most of the town's activities served the farmers of the area. Compared to New York, the town seemed agreeably rural to young Thorpe, and his painter's eye found extremely pleasing the century-old elms and the thick shrubbery around the cottages.

The college itself in 1834 was still a tiny, raw institution, for it had just been established by the New York and New England Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal church. The school had been located at Middletown at the invitation of the townspeople, who offered the Conference the buildings recently vacated by Captain Alden Partridge's American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy. Willbur Fisk had been president since the college opened its doors in 1831 with an enrollment of 48 students and a faculty of four, consisting of Fisk, Augustus W. Smith, Jacob Huber, a Swiss by birth, and Daniel D. Whedon, the only classicist of the group.

² Carl Fowler Price, *Wesleyan's First Century* (Middletown, Conn., 1932), 39.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

In 1834, when Thorpe enrolled, the students were not divided into classes of freshmen, sophomores, and the like; instead, the studies were grouped into five departments: Moral Science and Belles Lettres, Mathematics, Ancient Languages and Literature, Natural Science, and Modern Languages. Each student enrolled in one of these departments according to his advancement, and when he had completed the full course, he received his degree, without reference to the length of time he had attended.⁴

For the 1834-1835 academic year Thorpe enrolled in the Department of Mathematics, where he studied algebra, geometry, navigation, surveying, conic sections, Cambridge calculus, Almsted's natural philosophy, and astronomy. The curriculum was inflexible, containing no electives and requiring all students to complete the same course of study.

Smith, who was 32, taught the mathematics, physics, and astronomy courses. The studies were rigorous, and the method of the day demanded much memory work and frequent recitation in class.⁵ The college rules required that the students spend their evenings in their rooms studying. Attendance at chapel Sunday morning was compulsory, and Sunday afternoons the boys were expected to stay indoors studying "evidences of Christianity and kindred subjects."⁶ The regimen Thorpe found strict enough, especially after his taste of the bohemianism of the New York artists; but in spite of his impatience, he was eager to do well and seemingly not at all rebellious.

For the winter term of 1835-1836, two new members were added to the faculty, Joseph Holdich and John Johnson, who were expected to liberalize the curriculum and bear the added teaching load occasioned by President Fisk's absence, for he was planning a trip to Europe to buy

⁴ *Alumni Record of Wesleyan University* (Middletown, Conn., 1881-83), ix.

⁵ Price, *Wesleyan's First Century*, 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

books and scientific apparatus and to study the organization and teaching methods of the European universities. During this term Thorpe enrolled first in the Department of Moral Science and Belles Lettres, studying rhetoric, elements of criticism, evidences of Christianity, intellectual philosophy, moral philosophy, logic, political economy, and the Federalist Papers, under President Fisk and young Joseph Holdich.

Records of the Examining Committees are incomplete, but the notation does appear that in July, 1835, Thomas Bangs Thorpe passed rhetoric. The register of merits and demerits kept to record the moral and intellectual progress of the students indicates that Thorpe received three demerits for the spring and summer term of 1835. In fact, his list of demerits each term is comparatively high, for many students escaped without any. It is possible that his conduct and work were not always as circumspect and careful as Wesleyan would have liked of its sober scholars—perhaps further fruit of his observation in New York of the easy ways of Jarvis, Quidor, and Browere.

Thorpe also began his work in the Department of Natural Science during the 1835-1836 academic year. Under young John Johnson, Thorpe studied chemistry, geology, and mineralogy. The spring and summer term of 1836 was to be his last enrollment, and the college list of merits and demerits reflects some sort of difficulty, for he earned only 210 merits, the smallest number of his academic career, and $4\frac{1}{2}$ demerits, the greatest number he had thus far collected. What the merits and demerits measured and how they were awarded has long since been forgotten. They may reflect the beginning of the illness which was to prevent his returning to the college for the fall term. Whatever they meant, they record his poorest term at the college. Compared with the work of other students, however, they do not seem to indicate an unsatisfactory academic standing, and at the end of January, 1836, Thorpe was listed in the university records as one who was expected to graduate

the following year, 1837.⁷ In general, his total merits would appear to measure an average-to-superior academic achievement.

Gregarious and agreeable, Thorpe continued active in the Peithologian Society throughout his two years. He was frequently chosen to present the prepared essay that was a part of each program. Oftentimes he was the leading speaker during debates on such topics as "Is the doctrine of final perseverance of the saints consistent with Scripture or reason?"; "Which is preferable, public or private education?"; and "Does ancient or modern history provide more examples of patriotism?" The picture remains of earnest young men talking eagerly in little groups in the halls, or standing in the rooms of the society declaiming, with appropriate gestures, the speeches they had labored to adorn with the ornaments of Ciceronian rhetoric. Thorpe was usually among the young gentlemen who stood too long in the halls or strolled too slowly across the campus talking of their hopes and plans and their places in the new Republic, for time and time again he was fined half a Connecticut shilling for tardiness to meetings.⁸

After his academic work and his debating, Thorpe still found time to practice his art. Loaded with his paraphernalia, he wandered about the town and adjacent countryside, setting up his easel to paint the scenes that pleased him most. His work attracted the attention not only of the students but also of the faculty, and several of his views of the college were sent to New York to be lithographed: one reproduction by Anthony Fleetwood and another by George and William Endicott still hang at Wesleyan, scenes of North and South Colleges and of the town. In January of 1836 he was appointed by the Prudential Committee to paint a picture of a proposed new

⁷ *Alumni Record of Wesleyan University*, xxxix.

⁸ The minutes of the Peithologian Society for 1834 and 1835 are extant at Wesleyan University Library.

chapel for the campus, the painting to be sent to President Fisk, who was by then in Europe, to be lithographed abroad and used in raising funds for the project. Obviously Thorpe's talents for writing, speaking, and painting were appreciated and encouraged while he was at college; and later, in 1847, after he had spent ten years in Louisiana with a growing reputation as a writer, painter, and newspaper editor, he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts by Wesleyan University in recognition of his achievements.⁹

Meanwhile his health was growing worse. And it may be, too, that he was not altogether satisfied with his life at Wesleyan and with the prospects of whatever career for which his education was supposed to prepare him. Because he was plagued by restlessness and illness, his academic work began to suffer, and his classmates from the South urged him to try the clearer airs of the great Mississippi Valley.

Sons of the Burruss, McGehee, Magruder, and Vick families attended Wesleyan, all families owning plantations in Mississippi or Louisiana, and Thorpe found the young Southerners pleasant companions. A few of them shocked him with their dissipations and "reckless amusements," for he envisioned as his highest type the gentleman of manly conduct and cultivated manners, as well as of serious education, industrious habits, and "moral worth." Still, the young Southerners were his best friends. He admired their easy bearing, for he himself was often nervous in the presence of others in spite of his liking for society; and he accepted their casual breaches of discipline more readily than the sterner New England students, for young T. B. Thorpe, the minister's son, was himself habitually careless of time and appointments, and there was a degree of Knickerbocker urbanity in his temperament.

Among Thorpe's closest friends were Newett Vick, for whose father, also a Methodist minister, Vicksburg, Missis-

⁹ *Alumni Record of Wesleyan University*, 352.

sippi, was named; and John William Burruss, the generous son of the Reverend John Crenshaw Burruss, master of Bowling Green Plantation at Woodville, Mississippi. Young Burruss and Thorpe shared a taste for dialect jokes, Irving's Dutch humor, Shakespeare's plays, English poetry, and Montaigne.¹⁰ Burruss, too, urged Thorpe to live for a while in the South, describing the mildness of the climate, the beauty of the forests, and the many opportunities open to an ambitious young man in a country with cities as old as New Orleans and frontiers as new as Arkansas. Thorpe hoped it might be possible for him to go.

His health continued bad, and at the end of the term in the summer of 1836 he left Wesleyan and returned to New York to live with his mother and stepfather. The New York summer was hot, many died of the plague again, and Rebecca Thorp worried over the health of her son. The specter of Thomas Thorp's tuberculosis haunted the family. John Burruss, on his way back to Mississippi, came by to visit Thorpe and again offered his help and the hospitality of his home if Thorpe would visit in the South for a while. Young Daniel Ostrander Merwin, another of the Wesleyan students, had already gone South. Aaron Bangs, the son of the Nathan Bangs for whom Thorpe was named, was teaching at Columbus, Mississippi. All together there were many family friends and acquaintances in the area. The possibility of Thorpe's getting some commissions for portraits was discussed, and at last he decided to make the trip. Burruss was to return to Mississippi by ship. Thorpe accompanied him to the wharf to see him off, promising to meet him soon in the South.

¹⁰ Letter from Thorpe to Burruss, January, 1837. The original is in the Louisiana State University, Department of Archives.

Louisiana in the South

THORPE DELAYED HIS MOVE, REMAINING IN NEW YORK through the fall and into the winter of 1836, but at the end of the year he began his trip. He and Newett Vick of Vicksburg, his classmate at Wesleyan, started for the South together, and together traveled by stagecoach to Philadelphia. But here, after some days' delay, young Vick decided to remain for a while, and Thorpe went on alone.

West over the Appalachian Mountains the stage with its six passengers rolled to Wheeling, where Thorpe hoped to take a boat. The innkeeper at Wheeling informed the group that the Ohio was frozen. Consequently, Thorpe was forced to continue South by stage through rain, hail, sleet, and snow to Cincinnati, dozing and falling in the freezing coach for 500 miles, exhausted and miserable. Adding to the hardships and uncertainties of the journey was, what seemed to Thorpe, the banditry of the coachmen. The drivers between Wheeling and Cincinnati had had some sort of misunderstanding with the owners, and they redressed their grievances by the simple expedient of forcing the passengers to pay extra. Wrote Thorpe to his friend Burruss, "the whole line for near three hundred miles was in a

complete state of mutiny. As a specimen we were detained in one place eighteen hours through the beastly intoxication of an Irishman.”¹

Finally, by January 2, 1837, Thorpe reached Cincinnati. It was from here that he wrote recounting the miseries of the trip and forwarding the bill of lading for a box containing his clothes and other belongings. He planned to continue the trip down the Ohio and Mississippi to Bayou Sara, Louisiana, where he asked Burruss to write him, so that he would find a letter when he arrived. Thorpe added that the box contained a number of valuable books, some of which he had bought at Burruss's request, including a copy of Montaigne and an anthology of English poetry.

What specific plans Thorpe had for painting or other activities in the South are not clear from the three extant letters he wrote John William Burruss. By September of 1837 he was living at Baton Rouge, where his hopes suffered some unexplained reversal. On September 12 he wrote Burruss again, in a dismally depressed mood, referring to a crashing disappointment which had taught him, he said, the vanity of his “thinking of happiness.” Generous young Burruss had already visited Thorpe in Baton Rouge and, with more enthusiasm than judgment, urged on him the infinite possibilities of an artistic conquest of New Orleans, a much bigger city than Baton Rouge. Thorpe's youthful hopes were revived, and shortly he began planning his move to the port city.

During the conversation between the two friends, Burruss had spoken of his many acquaintances in New Orleans and had promised to recommend Thorpe's work to them. Thorpe's pride and sensitivity were troubled by his position, and after some meditation, he suggested another procedure

¹ Three Thorpe letters to John William Burruss are in the George M. Lester Collection, Department of Archives of the Louisiana State University. Subsequent references to Burruss letters will be to this collection.

by his friend. He pointed out that Burruss could not really judge his ability as an artist and that his letters would be most helpful if he would simply introduce Thorpe as a gentleman. "I will not use a single iota of your influence in New Orleans if [you] cannot introduce me there as a person [in] every way worthy of the highest esteem as a gentleman, one that you [can] without hesitation from long acquaintance introduce as such and one whom you feel a personal and anxious interest for. Here John is the only ground upon which you [stand] as the Judge."

It appears from the letter that Thorpe was most sensitive about his financial insecurity. He was uneasy lest he appear in New Orleans as an "*inexperienced artist, an adventurer, a person patronized.*" His family background, as the son of a minister, and his education fulfilled the requirements which his age had established as proper to the condition of a gentleman. Unhappily, he lacked the income appropriate to the estate, and this he was now setting out to obtain. Time and time again the word *gentleman* appears in his letters, clearly a guiding symbol for young Thorpe.

At the end of November, 1837, Thorpe again wrote Burruss from Baton Rouge, congratulating him on his engagement to Sarah Houston McGehee, whom he was to marry on January 4, 1838.² The letter is particularly interesting in the light of Thorpe's later development because it again casts light on his reading and, more importantly, shows a well-developed sense of humor. Thorpe quoted both Shakespeare and Pickwick on marriage, the latter choice revealing that he was a reader who kept up with the work of his contemporaries, for Dickens was just appearing on the literary scene in 1837. Thorpe's ceremonial jokes in his letter to his friend were kindly and amiable, and his sense of humor quick and ready. The mood of

² From James S. McGehee Papers in the Department of Archives of Louisiana State University.

the note is pleasant, even sunny, and in sharp contrast to the powerful depression of his earlier letter to Burruss. It exhibits a changeable temperament, one extremely sensitive to outside circumstances and to the feelings of others.

Among the news of college friends he passed on to Burruss was a note of the death of Aaron Bangs, who was lost at sea off Hatteras the preceding October "while traveling to attend Nathan's wedding." The Nathan referred to, no doubt, was William Hezekiah Nathan Magruder, an 1836 graduate of Wesleyan and the son of James Truman Magruder. Nathan Magruder married Aaron Bangs's sister Mary at Hartford, Connecticut, November 23, 1837, and the two returned to live near Vicksburg until 1842, when Magruder became Professor of Ancient Languages at Centenary College.³

Thorpe added that he was delaying his trip to New Orleans nearly two weeks, attending to business in Baton Rouge, but he expected to leave about mid-December. Apparently, however, he did not succeed in establishing himself as an artist in New Orleans in 1838, where he did portraits and still lifes, and perhaps other work; for by the summer of 1839 he was back up the river at Jackson, Louisiana, and at Jackson and St. Francisville he was to spend the next few years.

Jackson and St. Francisville are both in the parish of West Feliciana, which lies a few miles above Baton Rouge in the eastern part of the state, just south of the Mississippi border. The western boundary of the parish is the Mississippi River. This section of Louisiana is quite different in appearance from the flat marshes and swamps to the south and the prairies to the west. It is a high, rolling country, covered with pines, beech, and water oaks, much unlike the cypress and live oaks of the flat lands. The immense magnolias grow here as everywhere in the state. Hedgerows

³ Dean Dudley, *History and Genealogy of the Bangs Family in America* (Montrose, Mass., 1896), 164.

of yellow jasmine and Cherokee rose divide the fields, and the hills are heavily wooded with trees and shrubs. Although it has its ports and plantations along the river, it is less dominated by the Mississippi than the parishes farther south. Instead of the slow, muddy bayous of the southern region, clear, sandy-bottomed streams wind through the country, with Thompson's Creek looping across the parish from above the Mississippi border to the river at the southern boundary of the parish.

Thorpe was forming attachments in the area, not only with his college friends, their relatives, and others connected with the Methodist church, but more widely among the planters of the Felicianas, who represented a culture having more in common with the Knickerbocker bohemianism of the New York painters than with the Protestant ecstasy of the frontier camp meetings.

Among the well-to-do planters for whom Thorpe painted was Bennet H. Barrow, owner of Highland Plantation near St. Francisville. From Barrow the observant young painter learned much about life in the South. In many ways Barrow was representative of the man that the Southern plantation was producing from 1830 to 1860, the years when cotton was king. Thorpe, the Methodist minister's son, could observe in Barrow a man who not only did not attend church himself, but who also barely tolerated what few professions of Christianity he observed in his neighbors. As for preaching to the slaves, Barrow wrote in his diary that it was the "greatest piece of foolishness any one was ever guilty of."⁴ Barrow's attitude toward the churchly may have differed from that of the Burrusses, the Vicks, and the McGehees, but it was far more usual in the area than theirs, for as early as 1826 the New England missionary Timothy Flint wrote "there is not discoverable in all the

⁴ Edwin Adams Davis (ed.), *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846, as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow* (New York, 1943), 45.

distance from St. Francisville to New Orleans, on either shore, a single Protestant house of worship.”⁵ Drinking, horse racing, gambling, hunting, fishing, and boisterous parties were the common amusements of the Felicianas, and if the wandering Methodist circuit riders denounced such worldliness and spread their own vision of Puritanism among the poorer frontiersmen and backwoodsmen, young Thorpe found such pleasant hedonism increasingly reasonable and acceptable.

Thorpe's name first appears in Barrow's diary under the date of April 24, 1841, when the planter, appropriately enough for his growing fortune, had the young gentleman from New York out to paint his daughter's portrait. Careful farmer Barrow first recorded the day's weather, writing, "Few clouds warm—Mr. Thorp came out to take Caroline Joors Portrait." A few days later Barrow had young Thorpe at work on an even more important project for the adornment of the wall over the mantelpiece at Highland Plantation: "Few clouds. verry warm—Ploughing corn 50 acres ploughed second time, Capt. Chambers of E. Feliciana came up this evening, *set for my Portrait.*" Observant and speculative as he was, Thorpe must have felt that in drawing Barrow he was drawing a representative portrait of the South, a portrait he was beginning to understand in broader terms, to accept as generally admirable and appealing, occasionally exasperating, and eventually, for all his love and all his heart's desire, to find strangely baffling.

But for the present Thorpe was discovering his place in the society of the planters, in spite of the flashing despair over his financial conditions that he had expressed to his friend John Burruss and his uneasiness lest he not be accepted as a gentleman. A gentleman he was, however, humorous and amiable, developing an easy flow of talk, and as such the planters accepted him. Barrow wrote in his

⁵ Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Year . . .* (Boston, 1826), 289.

diary in July, 1841, of having Thorpe out to dinner at Highland and of going to a neighborhood party later: "Went to town back to dinner. Mr. Thorp with me. Went to A. G. Howells this evening a Fish Fry there to day haven't seen as drunken a set in a great While &c. . . ." Again Barrow's spare account illuminates for a brief instant Thorpe at 26, stocky and red-haired, riding on horseback under the tall trees of the Felicianas out from St. Francisville to Highland for dinner and then to a neighboring plantation where the rowdy Howells caused even Barrow to comment.

Many like Thorpe enjoyed the kindly generosity of the planters, who yet maintained their sectional prejudice against Northerners. Barrow himself was opposed to Yankee speculators "coming out here" to seek their fortunes, and he added, "stragling foreigners, are no better . . ." Yet Barrow was incredibly generous, not only with his neighbors but with strangers. His willingness to sign notes for others cost him over \$20,000 in his lifetime. But absolutely incredible to Barrow's concrete generosity was the New Englanders' concern over the status of the Negro, for Barrow's daily experience—everyman's teacher—showed him that the colored people were mere children, incapable of caring for themselves. He saved his most violent denunciations for meddling Northerners. No doubt Thorpe was finding his sense of humor a useful weapon with which to parry the planters' blunt denunciations of the North and whatever of its politics displeased them.

Especially on their hunting trips Thorpe found an easy and natural access to the male society of the South. In contributions to the *New York Spirit of the Times* in 1840 he described hunts for deer and bear and even expeditions for buffalo, accounts which made it plain that he accompanied the planters with increasing frequency and with the keenest pleasure on the excursions which were their constant recreation.

In September of 1841 he described for the readers of the paper Barrow's pleasure craft, the little steamer *Nimrod*. "The 'Nimrod' is finished, and there is no prettier craft afloat. The wealth and taste of the owner would guarantee this." The ship was especially built for hunting trips on the Mississippi and its tributaries and adjoining lakes. It had accommodations for ten to twelve horses and two packs of hounds on deck. It was equipped with an elaborately stocked bar, which, to Thorpe's delight, had no money drawer. Thorpe's references to the owner's good taste and his exultant descriptions of the luxuries of the craft make it clear that he was pleased and flattered by Barrow's attention, and wished to flatter him in return. He said of himself that he was fond of society and enjoyed telling stories, a favorite pastime on hunting trips. His easygoing, agreeable, and gregarious ways quickly made him a pleasant and welcome addition to the society of the Felicianas, and the planters were finding him as acceptable as he found them.

Later Barrow's diary recorded a minor disagreement with Thorpe over the price of the framing of the pictures, a minor incident but one adding to the evidence of the Burruss letters that Thorpe was having a difficult time financially as an artist. Too, during these first years in Louisiana Thorpe was increasing his responsibilities, for probably in 1838 (the date is uncertain) he married Anne Maria Hinckley.

Maria Hinckley, born in Maine in 1819, was perhaps the daughter of Charles Albert Hinckley, who had married Thorpe's mother a few years earlier. She bore Thorpe three children, she loved flowers, and a caller once wrote that she was a "refined and accomplished" lady, but beyond this almost nothing is known of Maria Thorpe.⁶

⁶ See New York *Spirit of the Times*, XX (July 27, 1850), 270-71 (hereinafter cited as *Spirit*).

*Tom Owen,
the Bee Hunter*

MEANWHILE, IN THE SUMMER OF 1839 THORPE APPEARED for the first time in print. Within the next few years he was to produce the small body of sketches of life on the Southwestern Frontier for which he is remembered today. The characters and scenes of the lower Mississippi he observed with a painter's eye, a quick ear for the American vernacular, and a keen and sympathetic interest in the kind of man the frontier was producing.

Thorpe's first sketch described an unusual backwoods craft he had observed while riding through the countryside of East Feliciana during the fall of 1838. At the time Thorpe was visiting with one of his friends, and he, with his host and a small group of gentlemen, rode into Jackson, the parish seat, to hear a political speech. On the way they met Tom Owen, a well-known local character who topped trees for the Feliciana planters. Tom's real love, however, was not his vocation, for he "was what the Irish call, a Natural—he had but one idea, and that was to hunt bees."

Thorpe and the others followed him, watching him line the bees to their tree, fell it, and get the honey.

Tom Owen was about fifty years old at the time, and something of a backwoods wit and character. One of the planters suggested that Thorpe write a sketch of the incident, saying that all the local people knew Tom and would enjoy reading about him. Thorpe was the natural choice to write the adventure, for he had been to college, had artistic tastes, and was recognized as a witty and clever storyteller. As the incident had interested and amused Thorpe, he did write a sketch and sent it to one of the local papers. The editor of the little country weekly found it amusing but long, and after keeping it for three months sent it back unpublished. Thorpe threw the manuscript into a drawer, but finally at the suggestion of one of the planters who knew the magazine, he submitted it to the New York *Spirit of the Times*.¹

Although Thorpe himself did not know this paper at the time he sent his sketch in, he could not have made a happier choice. It is quite possible that, without the direction and support of William Trotter Porter, the owner and editor of the *Spirit*, Thorpe would not have done any more writing.

The magazine was, as its masthead proclaimed, a *Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage*, first issued December 10, 1831, when Porter was only twenty-two.² Porter was of old Tory New England stock, and his wealthy Episcopalian grandfather had, during the American Revolution, remained a Tory, like Thorpe's grandfather Elisha. Like Elisha, too, he moved to Canada,

¹ *Spirit*, XXIX (February 26, 1859), 26; and XX (July 27, 1850), 271. Data on Tom Owen: *Census of 1840*, parish of East Feliciana.

² Norris Yates, "The *Spirit of the Times*: Its Early History and Some of Its Contributors," separate from *Papers* of the Bibliographical Society of America, XLVIII (Second Quarter, 1954), 3. For the history of Porter, his journal, and its contributors, see Yates' *William T. Porter and the Spirit of the Times* (Baton Rouge, 1957).

received a grant of land from the Crown, but eventually returned to the United States. By the time of William Trotter Porter's birth the family was in somewhat reduced circumstances, and instead of attending college, he apprenticed himself at 18 to a printer in Andover, Massachusetts. Intelligent and genial, he was, within two years, editor of the *Farmer's Herald* at St. Johnsbury, Vermont, and within another two years he moved to New York to establish the *Spirit*, employing as his first compositor a gawky country youth named Horace Greeley.

Porter, like the rest of his family, delighted in horses and horse racing, and at first his magazine was primarily devoted to the interests of owners and breeders. For its literary content the paper merely reprinted the work of the most popular English authors of the day, without, of course, payment to them. Literary piracy was the custom of the time, a practice defended for the next half century on the lofty moral ground that it enabled editors to give American freemen the best of the world's literature at the lowest price and was thus necessary to the proper flowering of democracy.

As time passed, Porter became more and more interested in the literature that recorded adventures of the explorers, hunters, and frontiersmen of the American West and South, for these were the areas of the frontier, and even in Mississippi the hunters' shacks outnumbered the Windy Hill Manors by an uncomfortable margin. The literature of backwoods adventure had long been printed in the British sporting journals, and similar sketches were appearing with increasing frequency in the newspapers of the United States. Porter began reprinting tales and sketches from the English magazines and encouraging correspondents for his own paper. By February of 1840 he could compare favorably the sporting literature of American writers to what the English papers were producing:

It is the exhaustless supply of material of this nature—the adventurous life of a frontier-settler—incidents of travel over prairies and among mountains hitherto unknown to the white man—the singular variety of manners in different States, springing from their different origin, or of climate and product—peculiarities of scenery unhackneyed by a thousand tourists—to this is to be attributed the greater freshness and raciness of American sketches. . . .

Life at the West and South, is a teeming theme for Magazine writers; but the cleverest and most amusing have certainly been of a sporting nature. . . . "The Spirit of the Times" has been greatly favored with communications of this description, particularly from the famous "Pete Whetstone," of the Devil's Fork of the Little Red; and by the author of "A Quarter Race," and "Jones's Fight." Their letters are constantly copied in England, with the encomiums of editors. What can we do to keep their pens constantly moving?

Porter's taste did not limit him to hunting sketches, for he was also pleased with accounts of the peculiarities of local customs and characters of the West and South. Among his earliest correspondents he counted "Frank Forester," pseudonym of Henry William Herbert, Oxford graduate and gifted English expatriate; William P. Hawes, whose pen name was "J. Cypress, Jr."; "Pete Whetstone," Colonel C. F. M. Noland, Arkansas lawyer, legislator and editor of the Batesville, Arkansas, *Eagle*; and Thomas Kirkland, the vastly wealthy planter and racehorse owner of northern Alabama, a gentleman who never did let his name appear with his sketches.³

Porter's concluding plea for his correspondents to continue sending him material he repeated again and again in his paper, addressing his writers collectively and as individuals, calling attention to the excellences of their work and giving them praise, encouragement, and friendly

³ *Spirit*, XXVII (May 22, 1858), 170; *Porter's Spirit*, IV (May 22, 1858), 185; *Spirit*, XI (March 27, 1841), 31; and, for identification of Thomas Kirkland see Yates' "*The Spirit of the Times: Its Early History and Some of Its Contributors*," 12, 22.

criticism. He did not generally pay for the manuscripts he received, for most of his correspondents wrote as amateurs and gentlemen of leisure. By the compelling charm of his personality he kept them writing, and by his critical judgment he guided them until he became probably the most important single force in creating the humorous and realistic local color literature of the frontier.

Thorpe's "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" appeared in the *New York Spirit of the Times* July 27, 1839, as "By a New Yorker in Louisiana." It was dated from Jackson, Louisiana, where Thorpe was visiting, and signed "T. B. T." The sketch itself describes the circumstances under which Thorpe met Tom Owen. It opens with a reference to Thorpe's reason for coming to the South: "On a beautiful Southern October at the hospitable mansion of a friend where I was staying . . . to court the roseate hue of health" it begins, and continues to tell how the group of gentlemen fell into the train of the bee hunter.

Of bee hunting as a frontier occupation, Thorpe observed, "As a country becomes cleared up and settled, Bee-hunters disappear; consequently they are seldom or never noticed." Bee hunting, apparently, is no longer a sufficiently heroic occupation to attract literary attention, but at the time Thorpe wrote there was some interest in this unusual woodcraft. Chapter IX of Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies*, published in 1835, is entitled "A Bee Hunt." It describes the appearance and character of the backwoodsman who was the bee hunter and tells how he lured the bees to their tree, felled it, and took the honey. Thorpe knew Irving's work well, and it is altogether possible that he had read the description, for he shared the age's interest in literature describing life on the frontier. The opening paragraph of Thorpe's sketch also reveals that he knew some of the Crockett books, one of which introduced a bee hunter. *Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas* (1837) tells of the Colonel's falling in with a bee hunter, who

accompanied him on a good part of his picaresque journey which ended at the Alamo. James Fenimore Cooper, whose work Thorpe also knew, had a bee hunter in *The Prairie* (1827), and later Cooper made Ben Boden, the hero of *The Oak Openings*, a member of the craft.

Thorpe's point of view for his essay is that of an urbane onlooker observing a curious occupation carried on by an unusual and humorous rural character. He explains his recording of so odd a pursuit in his opening paragraph:

To chronicle the exploits of sportsmen is commendable: the custom began as early as the days of the ante-deluvians, for we read that "Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord." Familiar, however, as Nimrod's name may be, or even Davy Crockett's, what does it amount to when we reflect that TOM OWEN, the bee hunter, is comparatively unknown.

The marks of preparation for local consumption are clear in the piece. Thorpe meant that the comparison of old Tom Owen, who was known to everybody in the Felicianas, to such heroes as Nimrod, or even Davy Crockett, should amuse by its elevation of the trivial and inconsequential into the mock-heroic. The treatment is solemn, the comparisons are to serious literature, and the descriptions are concrete, detailed, and factual, making the piece of more interest to the historian than to the general reader. Thorpe's attitude toward his backwoodsman was still unformed at the time he wrote the sketch, and in consequence the tone shifts unsurely from the reportorial to the condescending.

The humor turns on the character of Tom Owen. In describing him, Thorpe begins, "the difference between him and ordinary men was visible at a glance; perhaps it showed itself as much in the perfect contempt of fashion he displayed in the adornment of his outward man as it did in the more elevated qualities of his mind that were visible in his face." Tom was meant to be humorous simply because his clothes were odd and his speech quaint. Most of the writing is in the essayist's style, with the story told

from the author's point of view; the sentences are long and the diction literary. The piece owes more for its style to Washington Irving and the *Spectator* than it does to the tradition of frontier literature.

Porter was pleased with the tale, recognizing at once that he had in Thorpe a contributor of unusual literary ability. Other editors agreed, and the sketch was widely reprinted in American and European papers. It appeared in the *Calcutta Gazette*, among others, and was translated into French and Italian. Porter attempted to account for its popularity several times, writing in 1853 that it was republished first in English magazines, then on the continent, and finally as far off as Hindostan. "This article, so popular, was but the simple description of a man who made gathering wild honey a business in the Southern forests . . . but the manner in which it was related, gave it a character of inimitable humor and picturesqueness." Later the piece was reprinted in the two most famous mid-century anthologies of American literature—Rufus Wilmot Griswold's *Prose Writers of America* (1847) and George and Evert Duyckinck's *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* (1855). No doubt the style contributed to the popularity of the sketch. The thoroughly respectable literary manner, combined with the Southern matter, might have made readers feel that they were getting a taste of the eagerly anticipated American literature by a writer who worked in the tradition which cultured people understood and approved.

2

Sometime during the winter of 1839–1840, Thorpe's wife Anne Maria returned from the Felicianas to New York, probably to be with her family at the birth of her first child, a daughter named Anna after her mother. Whether Thorpe went up to New York with his wife or followed

later is not clear, but by the spring of 1840 he was back in the city, listing himself in the directory as a portrait painter with a studio at 278 Bowery and a home address the same as that of his mother and stepfather, Charles Albert Hinckley. The family's living arrangement lends plausibility to the supposition that Thorpe's wife was the daughter of his stepfather.

Thorpe's keeping a studio in New York apparently means that he did not yet consider himself settled in the South, where indeed he had not succeeded in establishing himself financially as he had hoped. Perhaps he felt that now his health would withstand the winters of New York; perhaps he expected his opportunities would be greater in the city.

Sometime after he arrived in New York he learned that his "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" had been accepted and printed in the *Spirit of the Times*. He called at the paper's office on Barclay Street to meet the editor, William Trotter Porter, perhaps with the idea of selling a painting. Instead, the tall and charming Mr. Porter praised Thorpe's sketch, told him of its wide popularity, recounted the history of its reprinting abroad, and with ebullient and irresistible enthusiasm drew from him the promise of more tales for the journal—even infected him, apparently, with the idea of becoming a professional writer.

Together the two stepped down the street for a drink at Frank's public house, where Porter could introduce Thorpe to some of his friends. The description of Frank's, written some twenty years after Thorpe's first visit, is worth reprinting for the picture it gives of the habitat and philosophy of the friends of Thorpe and Porter:

During the palmy days of the old Olympic, when Mitchell's "little box" was the nightly rendezvous of a knot of men about town—fast men of an almost bygone generation, these "bloods" were wont to congregate before, or after the play, at a quaint public house on the corner of Howard-street, bearing a mysterious signboard, representing something like a counterfeit of those engravings we were wont to see pasted on the inside of an

imported segar box. This place, designated the Havannah House, at that period was beneath the supervision of a hearty Italian, Francis Monteverde, afterwards more familiarly known as "Frank," and nightly were assembled beneath his roof, motley crowds of actors and patrons, of sportsmen and of fast gentlemen, discussing the merits of the drama, of the turf, and of the chase, interrupted only by the monotonous clang of domino pieces, employed in deciding wine wagers, by means of the then novel game of "rounce."

Noted as was the Havannah House, fortune, however, destined Mr. Monteverde to preside over the destinies of another establishment still more famous, and whose memory will be treasured, in connection with the celebrated sporting sheet, the "Spirit of the Times," as the favorite resort of the coterie of talented gentlemen who delighted to contribute to the columns of that popular journal. Unlike his neighbors, who considered it necessary to migrate to the outskirts of the metropolis to anticipate the emergencies of trade, Frank made a crab-like retrogression and located his hostelry at No. 5 Barclay-street, which he forthwith christened by the title of "Frank's." Within a few doors of his resting spot was located the office of the "Spirit"—that museum of literary, artistic and sporting marvels, the Mecca of every Western pilgrim visiting the Atlantic metropolis. . . .

There were peculiarities distinguishing "Frank's" which could be encountered in no other public house in the city; it was a specialty in its very nature, being to the literary man and the higher class of sportsmen, a species of intellectual exchange, comparable to the mercantile relation that "Delmonico's" bears to its trading patrons. It was the distinction of "Frank's" that its patrons were considered almost wholly as gentlemen, as the term was interpreted by the conservatives of twenty years since, meaning thereby men of independent resources [or] members of the learned profession. In truth the frequenters at "Frank's" despised anything like mercantile pursuits, for, being gentlemen of education, they treasured a traditional prejudice against that which we are, now-a-days, tutored to designate the dignity of commerce.⁴

Among the habitués of Frank's in the early 1840's, the history mentions the Porters, William Trotter and his brother, Dr. T. Olcott Porter, who, with Nathaniel Parker

⁴ Reprinted from the New York *Leader* in the *Spirit*, XXIX (April 23, 1859), 123-24.

Willis, founded the short-lived *Corsair*; Lewis Gaylord Clark, editor of the *Knickerbocker*; Colonel Albert Pike; the painters Henry Inman and Charles L. Elliott, Thorpe's old friend; the poet Fitz-Greene Halleck; and, when in New York on visits from the South, George Wilkins Kendall, owner of the New Orleans *Picayune*; and Thorpe himself. Although representing a variety of abilities and professions, these men were united in having a gentleman's amateur interest in the turf, rod and gun, field sports, the stage, literature, and painting. If intellectual interests, religion, or politics were mentioned at Frank's, the prevailing opinions of these gentlemen were orthodox and conservative.

Thorpe returned home from his visit with Porter full of sanguine enthusiasm for the literary profession and with perhaps even a half-formed hope of establishing himself as a writer. Shortly he wrote another piece for Porter, "Wild Turkey Shooting, by the Author of Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter," and his pseudonym was established. The sketch was dated from New York City, July 12, 1840, and appeared on the first page of the August 1 issue of the *Spirit*. For its content, merely a description of a hunt, the essay is significant as Thorpe's first attempt to reproduce realistically the speech of the frontiersman. For his tall talk, he called Americans "a little of the tallest young people that ever breathed." And the Indian hunter of the sketch, in explaining how crafty the wild turkey is in detecting hunters, says, "First time he see me, dat damn Indian any how." Profanity, that exotic flower in Victorian literature, appears for the sake of realism.

The literary language of 1840, the language of "Tom Owen," was plainly and carefully differentiated from the vernacular. There was no developed tradition of language realism in polite letters. Thorpe's use of frontier talk is clearly the result of his introduction to the kind of writing that Porter was fostering through his *Spirit of the Times*. Porter liked the racy, the realistic, the humorous, and the

masculine, and he prized most highly those of his correspondents who were skillful in creating or reproducing such talk and such characters. Thorpe knew, too, the Crockett books, which included realistic material in their somewhat clumsy language. The meeting with Porter resulted not only in Thorpe's continuing to write but also in his attempting to reproduce the vernacular of his frontier characters.

Thorpe continued to experiment with his writing, searching for the most appropriate mode to describe the Old Southwest. Within a month after the appearance of "Wild Turkey Shooting" he had completed "Primitive Forests of the Mississippi," which appeared in the October 3, 1840, issue of the *Spirit*. This essay does not deal with backwoods characters; instead, it is a description of nature in the romantic tradition and of her power to stimulate and exalt the thoughts of man. The lush and rhapsodic description of the Southern forests is given as it would appear to a hunter traveling at night by torchlight, an unusual and dramatic point of view. The essay concludes with the effect of the experience on the author: ". . . with a mind filled with the sublimest emotions . . . I returned to the camp of my companions, their joyous backwoods mirth, their quaint jokes."

Thorpe's interest in nature as a mold of character and in the picturesque and the quaint was simply his own exploration of some aspects of the tradition in which he had been educated—the standard literary tradition of England and America in the 1840's, the tradition of Irving, Cooper, and Bryant, the tradition of the painters Asher Brown Durand, Thomas Cole, and others. Thorpe continued to explore parts of the romantic mode of address for his material from time to time, even exploiting the sentimental occasionally, although sentimentality was alien to his temperament. The age was a romantic one, and from the very beginning Thorpe was pulled two ways—toward accepted romanticism by the public taste and toward

exuberant frontier realism where his own genius functioned at its happiest.

In further pursuit of literary acquaintances and possibilities, Thorpe called on Lewis Gaylord Clark, editor of the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, most eminent of New York's literary periodicals. Clark, too, was amiable and even more practically helpful than Porter, for the October issue of Clark's magazine proclaimed that it had purchased one of Thorpe's paintings, an illustration of the Golden Age of Manahatta, after Irving's description of the felicitous reign of Wouter Van Twiller. The picture Clark described as "well designed, soft, and most pleasing," illustrating that delightful period when a "sweet and holy calm reigned over the whole province," a mood "exquisitely embodied in the picture in question."

Clark, who could be waspish and quarrelsome, was impressed with Thorpe's ability as artist and writer, and felt called upon to remark in his magazine on the young man's "amiable and mistaken modesty," feeling, apparently, that Thorpe's diffidence handicapped him. Porter, too, was later to comment privately in one of his letters to the Philadelphia publishers, Carey and Hart, on Thorpe's nervousness; but Clark's statement was a very unusual one to appear in print, indicating the extent of the impression Thorpe's personality had made and the sincerity of Clark's kindly regard for the young man. The notice, in which the comment appeared, rehearsed for *Knickerbocker* readers Thorpe's career in outline and revealed that Thorpe had had enough of New York and was returning again to Louisiana:

We alluded in our last number to a beautiful picture of New-Amsterdam in the time of WOUTER VAN TWILLER, from the pencil of Mr. T. B. Thorpe; and we advert to the subject again, to say, that when 'the times' shall have a little mended, we shall cause it to be reproduced on steel, for the edification of our readers. Mr. Thorpe is now on his way to the South and West, and we commend him to the courtesies and patronage of our readers in those regions, and particularly in those

felicitous sections, East and West Feliciana, (La.). . . . Mr. THORPE is an artist of decided genius, and sure promise; and but for an amiable and mistaken modesty—for the world meets nobody half way—would ere this have made himself most favorably known to the public.

During his visit with Clark, Thorpe also must have spoken of doing some articles for the *Knickerbocker* on the life and scenery of the South and West. Before he left he may have put in Clark's hands the manuscript of his essay, "The Mississippi," which appeared in the December, 1840, issue. Thorpe's description of the greatest of the American rivers is in the romantic tradition of sympathetic and moralistic interest in nature. Thorpe professed to find in the appearance of the river, "terrible lessons of strength and sublimity," but to his credit the prose is far less exotic and the examination of nature less egocentric than the fashion of the day encouraged. Parts of the descriptions are in direct and undecorated expository prose, revealing a clarity and simplicity of style setting him apart from the ordinary scribblers of the time.

Appearance in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* also meant for Thorpe that his name and abilities would become known to one of the standard literary audiences of the age, a genteel audience more respectable, more vapid and commonplace than the harder, masculine audience of Porter's *Spirit*. But like Porter, Clark made his *Knickerbocker* an "Original American Magazine," avoided stuffing it with pirated reprints, and showed independent critical discernment: he published Longfellow and Hawthorne while they were still unknown and printed early work of Bryant, Holmes, and Whittier. In 1847 he was to serialize *The Oregon Trail*. Clark recognized Thorpe's merit as well as his promise and, by publishing him, testified to the quality as well as the variety of Thorpe's work.⁵

⁵ For Clark's personality and his part in New York's literary life, see Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* (New York, 1956), and John Stafford, *Literary Criticism of "Young America"* (Berkeley, 1952).

From the very beginning of his writing, Thorpe had understood and mastered the received literary mode sufficiently to be a competent if not an outstanding practitioner of the romantic descriptive essay whenever he chose, although apparently writing for magazines was not rewarding enough financially to support him and his family in the 1840's.

He continued to write, but very occasionally, for the *Knickerbocker* in the following years. In August of 1841 appeared his "Old Dutch Houses and Their Associations," reminiscences of his childhood days in Albany while the family lived with his grandparents. He remembered playing house with Marie Vanderheyden in the old Vanderheyden Palace, meditated on the obsession of Dutch housewives with cleanliness, and recalled brief visions (reinforced, no doubt, by his later training) of the clear blue skies of David Teniers' paintings. The content of the essay is inconsequential, but the style is so easy, the tone so pleasant, and the humor so clear and gentle that it makes charming reading even today, with nothing to recommend it but the manner and the personality which lay behind it. Over a year later, in October, 1842, another piece by Thorpe appeared in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, "Place de la Croix," a sentimental tale of an Indian maiden's love for an explorer. Thorpe exploited the sentimental mood with modest enough success to cause, no doubt, polite ladies in New York drawing rooms to drop a tear for spotless and perfect love and the death of youth and bravery in far-off lands.

But meanwhile the year 1840 was drawing to a close, and Thomas Bangs Thorpe, his wife, and their first daughter, were setting out for Wheeling before the Ohio froze, on their way from the harsh New York winter to the incredible beauty of the Felicianas in the fall, where the pale, golden haze hangs over the rolling green land which only slowly turns yellow, brown, and red through the endless days, and where the vast towers of piled clouds stand on the horizon over the still valleys.

By December of 1840 Thorpe and his family were settled again in St. Francisville, the little village with its wooden houses and planless streets, standing on the low hills back from the Mississippi. It is safe to assume that the three of them lived in some small rented cottage, soon to be surrounded with the bright flowers which were Maria Thorpe's love. Here in St. Francisville Thorpe was to live for the next two and one-half years, painting for the planters, writing for the *Spirit of the Times* and the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, and listening with increasing attention to the grandiloquent rhetoric in which the Southern politicians offered up the issues of the day.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Big Bear of Arkansas

DURING THE NEXT TWO YEARS, 1841-1842, THORPE DID his best writing, not for the genteel audience of the *Knickerbocker*, but for the male readers of William Trotter Porter's New York *Spirit of the Times*. Porter and the readers of his journal shared Thorpe's keen interest in the Southwestern scene and the frontier character. Thorpe's easy humor and observant realism were answered by the sophisticated country gentlemen who appreciated a recognizable description of a bear or a hunter, who had an eye for beautiful women and fine horses, and whose simple judgments measured a man's worth by the money he managed to accumulate and the style of his manner.

Thorpe's final sketch for the year 1840 was dated from St. Francisville December 29. "Sporting in Louisiana" was done at Porter's request, for immediately under the title appeared the statement, "Written for the 'New York Spirit of the Times' by the Author of 'Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter.'" It is an account of a hunting trip of several days made by

three gentlemen of West Feliciana to the mouth of the Red River, some forty miles up the Mississippi from St. Francisville. Opening, "The citizens of Louisiana may with propriety be called a sporting people . . .," it proceeds to sketch for a national audience the traditional Southern hunt in vivid pictorial detail, showing the warmest appreciation and sympathy for the sport and revealing again that Thorpe himself was always an eager participant in such excursions.

Sporting writers in the United States were just beginning to appear, and Porter had several of the ablest as correspondents, a fact he pointed out in his editorial of February 1, 1840. Among them, probably the best was the Englishman Henry William Herbert, who wrote under the pen name of Frank Forester. He had taken honors in classics at Oxford and then migrated to the United States in 1831, possibly an exile to escape gambling debts.¹ He wrote many handbooks and novels on hunting, field sports, and the like before his suicide in 1858. This sporting literature was always the product of a boundless enthusiasm for the chase and the outdoors.

Because of Thorpe's national popularity he was later to reach a wider audience than Herbert, and some of his own hunting sketches rank with the best work produced at the time. Thorpe described the sport both as the aristocratic chase of the wealthy planter and as the necessary skill of the roving frontiersmen and squatters of the backwoods.

Thorpe's best known and easily his finest piece of writing was produced directly from his love of hunting and storytelling, and from his knowledge of the frontier characters of the Old Southwest whom he met on the hunting trips with the planters and on the steamboats of the Mississippi. His story "The Big Bear of Arkansas" appeared on the front page of the *Spirit* on March 27, 1841. It represents the most

¹ Harold W. Thompson, *Body, Boots, & Britches* (Philadelphia, 1940), 328.

notable achievement of the time in reproducing the character of the American frontiersmen. The tale recounts the hunt of a gigantic bear by Arkansas' greatest bear hunter, and as the sketch was praised and reprinted, it became so well known that Bernard DeVoto has called the body of literature which followed it the Big Bear School of Southern humorists. No other one of the tall tales of the Old Southwest achieved its complexity of structure and richness of content.

Thorpe's story uses the device of the framework, the tale within a tale, which was already old when Chaucer and Boccaccio used it. The reproduction of oral anecdotes lends itself naturally to this sort of treatment, and it became a frequent device in Southwestern humor, which drew heavily on popular lore for its material. Furthermore, the framework is a realistic device, for the art of the oral narrative flourished vigorously in the West and Southwest. Travelers on boats and in stagecoaches, soldiers, hunters around their campfires, politicians, lawyers, and judges all told stories for their own amusement, and they cherished those tales which reproduced the excitement of the chase with color and the vernacular with fidelity. Storytelling is an art which could be shared by the illiterate folk and by well-educated professional men. That it is an art still cherished needs no documentation.

The place and circumstances of the narrator when he heard the tale are significant in establishing the point of view; consequently the framework description characterizes the storyteller and is interesting for the stage it sets. As the framework is used in "The Big Bear of Arkansas," it serves to separate the world of the observer—an intelligent, traveled, well-educated man—from the rest of the audience and, more important, from the world of the Arkansas frontiersman, Jim Doggett.²

² For this insight and others I am indebted to Walter Blair, "The Technique of the Big Bear of Arkansas," *Southwest Review*, XXVIII (Summer, 1943), 426-35.

The first paragraph describes the kinds of people a traveler met in the 1830's and 1840's on upcountry Mississippi River steamboats. The narrator wrote that he had frequently found himself in such a crowd (as indeed Thorpe had). The opening is a conventional literary introduction to the setting. The second paragraph introduces the specific circumstances of the tale and the principal character, a backwoodsman who called himself the "Big Bar of Arkansasaw." He is first heard by the passengers in the cabin as he shouts frontier boasts from the bar, a noise he keeps up for some time.

As might have been expected, this continued interruption attracted the attention of every one in the cabin, all conversation dropped, and in the midst of this surprise the "Big Bar" walked into the cabin, took a chair, put his feet on the stove, and looking back over his shoulder, passed the general and familiar salute of "Strangers, how are you?" He then expressed himself as much at home as if he had been at "the Forks of Cypress," and "Perhaps a little more so." Some of the company at this familiarity looked a little angry, and some astonished; but in a moment every face was wreathed in a smile. There was something about the intruder that won the heart on sight. He appeared to be a man enjoying perfect health and contentment; his eyes were as sparkling as diamonds, and good-natured to simplicity. Then his perfect confidence in himself was irresistibly droll.

The Big Bear's talk and actions begin the creation of his character and his world for the reader, while the passengers' reactions to him and the author's comment in the last sentence serve to maintain the separation of the two areas of experience. Thorpe's tale is not merely the telling of an exciting anecdote or the recording of a bit of folklore, although it includes these. It is a literary creation to present an American type, and the experiences of that type, to a literate public.

The contrast between the two worlds is further emphasized when Jim Doggett himself relates some of his experi-

ences in New Orleans. "Some of the gentlemen thar called me *green*—well, perhaps I am, said I, *but I arn't so at home.*" After a few such speeches the reader is ready for the character who is not quite at home in the city—but who remains unabashed in such a condition. He is a citizen whose function lies in a wholly different area.

Doggett continues telling about his experiences in the city until one of his comments about Arkansas turkeys calls forth an exclamation from his audience, and the incredulity expressed at his exaggeration causes him to begin a description of his native state. A Hoosier among the listeners objects to the mosquitoes, and the Big Bear defends them. "But mosquitoes is natur, and I never find fault with her. If they ar large, Arkansaw is large, and a small mosquito would be of no more use in Arkansaw than preaching in a canebrake."

The next comment concerns bears, and the chorus of the audience is increased. ". . . a timid little man near me inquired if the bear in Arkansaw ever attacked the settlers in numbers." The frontiersman answers that they do not, "But the way they squander about in pairs and single ones is edifying." However, he is not ready to talk of bears yet—until he has told of his gun and his dog, Bowie-knife.

. . . and then that dog—whew! why the fellow thinks that the world is full of bar, he finds them so easy. It's lucky he don't talk as well as think; for with his natural modesty, if he should suddenly learn how much he is acknowledged to be ahead of all other dogs in the universe, he would be astonished to death in two minutes. Stranger, the dog knows a bar's way as well as a horse-jockey knows a woman's.

This last simile is a brilliant example of Thorpe's genius in capturing the subtle flavor of the American vernacular, with its astonishing imaginative freedom and its sometimes cynical humor. The simile is also proper to the structure of the sketch, for it serves not only to compliment Bowie-knife, but to hint revealingly at Jim Doggett's store of practical

worldly wisdom. Throughout the tale the Arkansawyer's easy flow of talk is notable for its abundance and the variety of its figures of speech.

The Big Bear continues to ramble on about Arkansas animals, the fertility of Arkansas soil, and the generosity of the American government in giving it away, all in the tradition of frontier tall talk. Finally the author reintroduces himself in his own character of the quietly observant bystander:

In this manner the evening was spent; but conscious that my association with so singular a personage would probably end before morning, I asked him if he would not give me a description of some particular bear hunt; adding that I took a great interest in such things, though I was no sportsman. The desire seemed to please him, and he squared himself round towards me, saying, that he could give me an idea of a bar hunt that was never beat in this world, or in any other. His manner was so singular that half of his story consisted in his excellent way of telling it, the great peculiarity of which was, the happy manner he had of emphasizing the prominent parts of his conversation. As near as I can recollect, I have italicized them, and given the story in his own words.

Again the framework of the tale is introduced, the narrator further characterized, and the climactic episode of the tale begun. All the points of view have been fully established, and the character of Jim Doggett concretely and dramatically presented. Almost one-half of the sketch builds toward the final and most important episode.

After some consideration, the Arkansas pioneer decides which of his many hunts he will tell about:

. . . Yes, I have it! I will give you an idea of a hunt, in which the greatest bar was killed that ever lived, *none excepted*; about an old fellow that I hunted, more or less, for two or three years; and if that ain't a particular bar hunt, I ain't got one to tell. But in the first place, stranger, let me say, I am pleased with you, because you ain't ashamed to gain information by asking, and listening, and that's what I say to Countess's pups every day when I'm home; and I have got great hopes for them ar pups, because they are continually nosing about. . . .

In this exchange of personalities, the polite interest of the narrator is answered with the easy condescension of the frontiersman. Although each man is conscious of the difference of the other's world, they can exchange compliments on the basis of a democratic equality, for each is a citizen of consequence in his own place.

The Arkansawyer opens his story by explaining that he had learned from an old pioneer how to tell the size of a bear by the height of the marks the animal made biting the trunks of trees. He became adept at taking the measure of his bears before seeing them. Then one day he discovered the highest marks he had ever seen:

Says I, "them marks is a hoax, or it indicates the d—t bar that was ever grown." In fact, stranger, I couldn't believe it was real, and I went on. Again I saw the same marks, at the same height, and *I knew the thing lived*. That conviction came home to my soul like an earthquake.

The hunter vows to kill the bear; the bear begins to eat his hogs; and at the first chase outruns horse and dogs, an impossibility for ordinary bears. "I would see that bar in everything I did," says the hunter, beginning to waste away from the fever of the never-ending chase; "he hunted me, and that, too, like a devil, which I began to think he was." Thus unobtrusively Thorpe introduces Doggett's feeling for the bear as a supernatural creature, a force of evil, but the hearers pay no attention to the frontiersman's casual and ambiguous comment.

The indefatigable hunter continues his pursuit of the great animal which troubles his spirit and wastes his homestead until one day with his pack he comes face to face with the creature. The bear is so ferocious that the dogs will not close with him, the hunter's gun snaps, and finally the animal escapes from the pack into a nearby lake where he swims out to an island. He is chased back into the water, and Bowie-knife goes in after him. They sink, struggling together, and the dog comes up alone. With a grapevine for a

rope the hunter fishes the carcass out—only to discover that it is not the old creature at all, but a smaller she-bear. “The way things got mixed up on the island was unaccountably curious,” mused the Arkansawyer, “and thinking of it made me more than ever convinced that I was hunting the devil himself.”

His neighbors begin to jest, and the frontiersman feels near defeat, but he prepares for a final hunt. “It was too much and I determined to catch that bar, go to Texas, or die.” The day before the expedition is ready, the bear pays a greatly unexpected visit to the homestead. He catches Doggett in the brush at his morning defecation, but the prudent Doggett always carries his gun and has his dog along on such expeditions. The squatting frontiersman describes the approaching bear’s size as the animal climbs over a rail fence: “He loomed up like a *black mist*, he seemed so large and he walked right toward me. I raised myself, took deliberate aim, and fired. Instantly the varmint wheeled, gave a yell, and *walked through the fence* like a falling tree would through a cob-web.” The hunter starts after him, but is tripped up by his “inexpressibles,” as trousers were called in polite society. By the time he gathers himself together he hears “the old varmint groaning in a thicket nearby, like a thousand sinners,” and he reaches him only to find the bear already dead.

Jim Doggett is delighted with the size of the creature and describes eloquently his immense skin. But he is not satisfied with the way he hunted and missed the animal, and with the way the bear gave in at last. “Perhaps he had heard of my preparations to hunt him the next day, so he just come in, like Capt. Scott’s coon, to save his wind to grunt with in dying; but that ain’t likely. My private opinion is, that that bar was an *unhunnable bar*, and *died when his time come*.” Jim Doggett’s tale is ended, and the narrator completes the story in two paragraphs in his own person, closing the framework. He observes that somehow the death

of the bear was troubling and even mysterious to Doggett. The author adds, "It was also evident that there was some superstitious awe connected with the affair,—a feeling common with all 'children of the wood' when they meet with anything out of their everyday experience." The narrator's comment repeats what Doggett has already revealed dramatically in the story itself through his repeated references to the bear as a devil and through the inexplicable disappearance of the animal on the island. Concretely the hunter reveals the powerful hold the bear had on the imagination of the folk, and more important, through this symbol Thorpe dramatizes the fearfully harsh oppositions of nature on the American frontier.

The language of the story is one of Thorpe's most praiseworthy accomplishments, truly notable for an age which looked upon the prose of Washington Irving as its highest literary achievement. The literary language of the time, as it is used by Cooper, Irving, and a host of lesser figures, is generally distinct from speech—its sentences long, its metaphors restrained and often traditional, its rhythms carefully constructed, and its vocabulary formal. Even Cooper's backwoods characters use an elevated diction. Obviously Thorpe accepted the idea of a literary language as proper under most circumstances, although he used an easier informality even in some of his *Knickerbocker* articles, and the opening and closing paragraphs of the "Big Bear" are done in the conventional style. This stiff, formal, literary prose escapes mediocrity in Thorpe's sketch because it is proper to the person of the narrator observing the frontiersman; it serves to contrast not merely the backgrounds of the traveling gentleman and the frontiersman, but more importantly, their characters and attitudes.

Even within the literary convention, Thorpe achieves a more concrete and direct style when he begins to describe the immediate scene. He had a good eye for the significant in whatever he described and a good ear for the spoken

language. With only the rudimentary beginnings of a tradition in which to work, he picked up the vernacular terms used for the citizens from the different parts of the country, and in describing his audience he notes Wolvereens, Suckers, Hoosiers, Buckeyes, and Corn-Crackers, as well as the half-horse, half-alligator men of the old Mississippi. In describing the action of his protagonist he achieves a graphic terseness that is vivid and concrete. "In the midst of this surprise the Big Bear walked into the cabin, took a chair, put his feet on the stove, and looking back over his shoulder, passed the general and familiar salute of 'Strangers, how are you?' " Place names such as Hurricane, Bloody Crossing, and Shirt-tail Bend, Thorpe took from various locations in Arkansas and Louisiana and rearranged them to suit the circumstances of his tale. These, too, reveal the realism and poetry of the American folk imagination, and Thorpe at once recognized the possibility of their use, not only to lend verisimilitude to the language, but also to characterize the frontiersman.

Once he begins reproducing the speech of his main character, Thorpe does his best work. He avoids the extreme of trying to reproduce phonetically the pronunciation of his protagonist but depends more on rhythm, vocabulary, and imagery for his effects of realism. The frontiersman's language is always appropriate to him: its malapropisms are partly innocent and partly contrived; its descriptions racy, vivid, and highly imaginative.

Thorpe's sense of the comic is as sure as his touch with the language. Generally the humor of the piece is not physical. Except for the unusual scatological situation, it does not depend on bodily discomfort, the torture of animals, or the collapse of furniture. On the contrary, it is a humor of character. The interest of the tale lies in the person of the Big Bear of Arkansas, who is representative of the frontier type and who is in no sense ridiculous. He is amusing because his language is coarse and direct when that of polite society is refined to abstract generalities. His life is sufficiently ad-

venturous, but in recounting his experiences, he exaggerates. He is boastful when polite society is modest. He is self-reliant—an individualist—at ease with himself even though he is quite aware that he deviates from the accepted pattern of proprieties and timidities. He is constructing his character on a new pattern. In his individualism there is a touch of the romantic concept of the natural man: the narrator sees him finally as a child of the woods. Thus he is presented at three levels. First, he is seen as the butt of the jokes of the cynical and ignorant New Orleans city cheats. Second, he is seen as the narrator's child of nature. And most elaborately, all points of view, including his own, combine to show him as the American frontiersman in action.

Jim Doggett, whether he ever existed or not, is a far more believable character than the real Davy Crockett of the *Sketches and Eccentricities*. The character of Crockett is a folk creation; it only begins with the real Davy. He is one of the demigods of the frontier. Doggett is not a folk creation. He is a character realistically and formally constructed for the literate and sophisticated audience of the New York *Spirit of the Times*. Doggett is one of the folk, and consequently, through his character the folk element enters the tale—he himself is the hunter larger than life, owning a dog of astonishing abilities, and pursuing a fabulous animal through the Western forests.³ The pursuit of the fabulous

³ Richard Dorson, in "The Identification of Folklore in American Literature," *Journal of American Folklore*, LXX (January-March, 1957), 1-8, says that Doggett's story is no folk tale because it is not to be found elsewhere in collections of American tales. He says, probably rightly, that it is a "literary invention," which does not mean, of course, that Thorpe could not have heard it pretty much as he wrote it. It does, moreover, have folk elements in it. For discussions of folklore in the Southwestern humorists see also Louis J. Budd, "Gentlemanly Humorists of the Old South," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, XVII (September, 1953), 232-40; James H. Penrod, "The Folk Mind in Early Southwestern Humor," *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin*, XVIII (June, 1952), 49-54, and "Folk Motifs in Old Southwestern Humor," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, XIX (March, 1955), 117-24. On bear fights as folklore, W. W. Lawrence sensibly remarks, "The

beast, an ancient motif in folklore, is appropriate, not only because it was frequently heard in the tales of the American backwoods, but also because it serves as a symbol of the powerful malignant forces of nature which the frontiersman had to face daily. The Arkansawyer states baldly the pioneer's alternatives in his struggle. "I determined to catch that bar, go to Texas, or die." Thus it is through Thorpe's skillful literary development of the elements of humor, folk fantasies, realism, and local color that he achieves dramatic unity and a complex richness of characterization in the presentation of the Western frontiersman.⁴

In all the body of frontier literature, "The Big Bear of Arkansas" is the masterpiece of its kind, created from Thorpe's habits of close observation, his interest in the literary convention of the American frontiersman, and his opportunity to observe at first hand the actual farmer and hunter of the Old Southwest. He was aware of the search for the American character and of the belief that the conditions of the frontier would bring forth that character. He knew the work of Cooper and Irving, both of whom had written of the frontier's pathfinders and hunters in the romantic mode. Upon this conventional background of the educated man, a second tradition had been imposed through his work for William Trotter Porter's *Spirit of the Times*. Before Thorpe knew Porter's paper, he had read the Crockett books, and from his acquaintance with the *Spirit* he became aware of the vigor and variety of the new frontier literature based on the realism of personal observation, on humor, and on the use of local color. His years in Louisiana had given him the opportunity for personal observation, the material of that color. He knew the backwoods of the

frequency of . . . bear fights in general, should make us cautious about drawing conclusions too confidently." "Some Disputed Questions in *Beowulf* Criticism," *Publications of Modern Language Association*, XXIV (1909), 237.

⁴ See Daniel G. Hoffman, *Paul Bunyan, Last of the Frontier Demigods* (Philadelphia, 1952), 67.

Felicianas. On his sporting trips with the planters he met the hunters of the country beyond the Mississippi, and on trips aboard the steamers of the great river he met the heterogeneous crowds of adventurers who were opening the western lands.

His own best sketch was written for the *Spirit* and thus immediately in the realistic and humorous tradition, but it was done against the background of the romantic quest, so that his story is primarily a character study and a symbolic representation of life on the frontier. The Big Bear emerges not as a rogue, nor as an object of satire, but as a strongly marked individual, humorous because he has chosen a mode of address to life that is comic, self-reliant because he has met the conditions of his existence, easy and frank because he is free and independent, and withal a little heroic.

Reporter of the Old Southwest

THE GROWING POPULARITY OF THORPE'S "BIG BEAR OF Arkansas" began when it was republished in the May *American Turf Register*. From Porter's two magazines it was reprinted widely in the newspapers and sporting journals at home and abroad. Editors were on the lookout for tales of the American West (and Arkansas was West in 1840): Thorpe's tale pictured the life of the Western border, and the character of his frontiersman represented a new development in the dawning age of the common man. Thorpe's pioneering Arkansawyer was admirable and more intelligent than the grotesque and absurd Davy Crockett. Desperate as was his struggle with nature, he still did not develop the brutality and degradation of spirit of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's dirt-eaters of the *Georgia Scenes*.

New as the "Big Bear" was, however, the literary modes that conditioned his creation—realistic reporting and use of local color and frontier humor of tall-talk—were not innovations in 1841. William Byrd of Virginia had drawn, with

gentlemanly scorn, the miserable poor-whites of Lubberland; Cooper had romanticized the pathfinder; and the comedian Noah Ludlow had presented on the New Orleans stage the fabulous half-horse, half-alligator men who manned the broadhorns on the Ohio and Mississippi. Colonel Nimrod Wildfire of James Kirke Paulding's *Lion of the West* (1831) was a representative of the type, and he, too, was played in the American theaters.¹ Thus a few traits of the character, the materials, and some of the literary conventions of the new Western man were being formed by the mid-1830's.

Thorpe's own contribution was not only his ability as a writer but also his immediate and specific interest in defining and presenting the character and life in the South and Southwest, particularly that of the frontiersmen. In the months after the "Big Bear of Arkansas" appeared, he produced in rapid succession a series of hunting sketches, nature essays, and frontier tales of humor and character, almost without exception remarkable for the clarity and simplicity of their style, their solidly detailed descriptions of nature and character, and their singularly pleasant humor.

Two weeks after Porter printed the "Big Bear" tale appeared a description of the popular Southern sport of night shooting, entitled "Woodcock Fire Hunting." This was followed by a casual letter to Porter about a deer run; then the essay on the first hunting trip up the Red River on Barrow's steamer, the *Nimrod*. In December, 1841, appeared "Opossums and 'Possum Hunting," mixing, in Thorpe's occasionally careless way, nature description, backwoods lore, and frontier humor. All these essays dealt largely with hunting in the Southern forests and were either humorous or simply reportorial in tone.

At the same time, but in a more romantic mode, were appearing his nature essays, which had begun with his work

¹ James Kirke Paulding, *Lion of the West*, ed. and with an introduction by James N. Tidwell (Stanford, Calif., 1954).

for the *Knickerbocker Magazine*. "Scenes on the Mississippi" was written for the September 4, 1841, *Spirit of the Times* and describes Thorpe's observations of a tribe of Indians being moved on boats up the Mississippi and then West. Thorpe sympathized with the unhappy circumstances of the Indians, but he wrote as a reporter rather than as a reformer, and the tone of the sketch, while melancholy, is never sentimental. "A Storm Scene on the Mississippi" describes the awesomely violent winds and rains of the lower South, which Thorpe had observed while traveling through the forests with a group of hunters. "Romance of the Woods, Wild Horses of the Western Prairies" is the account of events witnessed by a hunting party camped near a group of Osage warriors somewhere near the headwaters of the Arkansas and Black rivers. The sketch seems to be an eye-witness report and may be evidence that Thorpe traveled to northeastern Arkansas and northern Texas during the early 1840's, while the country was still frontier. Thorpe's account of the breaking of a horse grows sentimental with the observation that, after the ride, "big tears rolled down his cheeks." When the bridle and saddle were removed, "he walked slowly off, to be found, by a singular law of his nature, *associated with pack horses of the tribe*, and waiting for the burthens of his master." Such unnatural natural history is unusual with Thorpe, but he used the sentimentality as a popular fashion, exploiting it further in his "Place de la Croix" for the *Knickerbocker*, October, 1842.

During his years in St. Francisville Thorpe also began writing for the English journals. One of his best nature sketches, "The American Wild Cat," first appeared in the London *New Sporting Magazine* for July, 1842. After discussing the appearance and habitat of the animal and the modes of hunting it, Thorpe's essay, as always, turned to the discussion of the frontier character and language by noting how the wildcat had passed into the American imagination. The Western hunter, he noted, who wished to exceed the

ultimate in braggadocio, says of himself that he can "whip his weight in wild cats." Turning to Indian traditions, he wrote that the cat is supposed to gloat over the meaner displays of evil temper; for speaking of a quarrelsome family, the Indians will say that "the lodge containing them *fattens the wild cat*." Throughout, the essay was carefully prepared, and while primarily a sporting sketch about a new game animal for English readers, it included materials which were the result of intelligent observation of the impact of the frontier experience on the developing American character at the Southwestern borderlands. Through his writing for English journals and through their reprinting of his sketches that had first appeared in the United States, Thorpe began to enjoy a small but growing reputation in England as a frontier sporting writer.

2

Along with his hunting sketches and his descriptions of nature and scenes in the Southwest, Thorpe wrote three more humorous tales during 1841-1842 for the *Spirit of the Times*. "A Piano in Arkansas" appeared in the *Spirit* October 30, 1841, and of all Thorpe's writing is most closely related to the work Longstreet had done. It is a satire on frontier village life and the pretensions of backwoods ignorance. Although Colonel Crockett had passed through Arkansas on his way to Texas in 1835 and recorded some of his adventures with the natives in the *Exploits and Adventures*, Thorpe's sketch is the first elaborate social comedy by one of the Southwestern humorists to exploit what was eventually to become the legendary ignorance of the Arkansawyer.

The plot is simple: the villagers of Hardscrabble (which actually existed in Thorpe's time) learn that a new family is moving in with a piano, but what a piano is they do not know. The ancient gossips of the town circulate various re-

ports of the condition of the animal; one Mo Mercer, son of the local congressman, reveals that it is a musical instrument; then he points out the new family's washing machine to his friend as a piano; and finally at a party given by the newcomers, Mercer's mistake is revealed, ending his reputation as one intimate with the refined elegancies of fashionable society.

Thorpe's satire on the pretensions of Mercer and the innocence of the villagers is quite gentle. His aim was not to reform but simply to reveal the backwoods character and amuse his readers. Such marked detachment in the observation of human shortcomings is characteristic of much of the literature of the Old Southwest, which generally showed no desire to reform.

As a part of Thorpe's amiable social satire, "Opossums and 'Possum Hunting" already mentioned should be recalled. Although the piece is largely a nature essay, it is episodic in its structure, and one of its sections portrays humorously a backwoods revivalist of the sort Thorpe's own sect, the Methodists, were sending out into the frontier in ever-increasing numbers. For the metaphor of his sermon, the old Boanerges chose the opossum, crying "the world, the flesh, the devil compose the wind that is trying to blow you off the gospel tree. But don't let go of it, hold on to it as a 'possum would in a hurricane. If the forelegs of your passions get loose, hold on by your hind legs of conscientiousness; and if they get loose, hold on eternally by your tail, which is the promise that the saints shall persevere unto the end."

Thorpe did not invent the burlesque sermon. Indeed, "Dow, Jr." (E. F. Paige) had published a series of them in the New York *Sunday Mercury* in 1840 while Thorpe was in the city, but Thorpe's presentation of the frontier preacher's homely metaphor added another portrait to the gallery of American backwoodsmen. It is evidence, too, that Thorpe's quizzical humor extended to his own church.

For another tale of Western life, Thorpe chose the mighty Mike Fink, next to Davy Crockett the most important of the tall tale frontier heroes. Mike was the archetype of the brawling riverboatmen who traversed the Ohio and Mississippi rivers in keelboats and broadhorns before the coming of the steamers.² When Thorpe wrote "The Disgraced Scalp Lock" in the summer of 1842, Mike had been dead almost twenty years, and Thorpe was attempting to recall the traditions of an already passing West. As always, Thorpe was interested in the distinguishing qualities of the new American. In one of his early paragraphs he elaborated as fully as he had yet done his definition of the Western frontiersmen:

The manner, the language, and the dress of these individuals are all characteristic of sterling common sense, the manner modest, yet full of self-reliance, the language strong and forcible, from superiority of mind rather than from education, the dress studied for comfort rather than fashion; on the whole, you instantly become attached to them, and court their society. The good humor, the frankness, the practical sense, the reminiscences, the powerful frame, all indicate a character at the present day extinct and anomalous. . . .

Elsewhere in the sketch he noted Westerners were brave, hardy, open-handed, and, when most natural, "hyperbolic in thought and deed." For the first time in his examination of the character which the frontier was creating, Thorpe looked backward rather than forward. This turning to the past is not the only mark of the romantic tradition in the piece. Indeed, the essay could serve as a textbook demonstration of popular American romanticism: disregard of the literary forms of classicism and neoclassicism, emphasis on the emotional, exaltation of the common man, interest in nature, and literary use of the picturesque past.

The tale itself, however, is a realistic account of one of

² See Walter Blair and Franklin Meine, *Mike Fink, King of the Mississippi Keelboatmen* (New York, 1933), and *Half Horse Half Alligator* (Chicago, 1956).

those deeds of senseless brutality observed occasionally in the careers of the frontiersmen. It preserves the legend that Mike, to show his skill with the rifle, once shot off the scalp lock of a renegade Indian, Proud Joe. The Indian, to avenge the insult, pursued Mike's keelboat down the Mississippi, only to perish in the wild brawl which ensued when Indians and riverboatmen met.

The meeting of the traditions of romantic and realistic reporting here, however, is far less successful than in the "Big Bear" sketch. Indeed, Thorpe does not achieve a true amalgam but shifts from romantic character delineation to realistic reporting of action. He endows Mike with a romantic love of nature: "Wild and uncultivated as Mike appeared, he loved nature and had a soul that sometimes felt, while admiring it, an exalted enthusiasm." Sentimentally the nostalgic Mike bewails the passing of the good old days. Perhaps Thorpe took the brutal central incident from oral tradition (it does not seem to be the kind of thing he himself would invent) and modified Mike's character to suit the sentimental popular taste.³ The tale's best parts are its descriptions and the language of Mike's speeches.

"The Devil's Summer Retreat in Arkansaw," which followed in August, 1842, is almost as good as the "Big Bear." In form it is still transitional, loose in structure and falling between the essay and the short story as a type. Bob Herring, the Arkansas bear hunter, is as memorable a creation as Jim Doggett, and the language of the sketch is fully as brilliant as that of the earlier story.

Bob Herring's campfire tale of a bear hunt includes a description of an old animal cornered after he has been hamstrung by a careless shot:

³ The general tone of the piece recalls Morgan Neville's "The Last of the Boatmen," which had appeared in the giftbook, James Hall (ed.), *The Western Souvenir* (Cincinnati, 1828). Thorpe, however, borrows no details from Neville.

"Stranger, the bar, as I have said, was on his hams, and thar he sot, waiting to whip somebody and not knowing whar to begin, when the two dogs that followed me came up, and pitched into him like a caving bank. I knowed the result afor the fight began; Brusher had his whole scalp, ears and all, hanging over his nose in a minute, and Tig was laying some distance from the bar, on his back, breathing like a horse with the thumps; he wiped them both out with one stroke of his left paw, and thar he sot, knowing as well as I did, that he was not obliged to the dogs for the hole in his carcass, and thar I stood, like a fool, rifle in hand, watching him, instead of giving him another ball."

The hunter recollected himself and fired again, but missed. The bear then lunged for him, backing him up against the bank, and the backwoodsman's description of the stiffening of his facial muscles through fear is convincingly done: "If I ever had the 'narvious' that was the time, for the skin on my face seemed an inch thick, and my eyes had more rings in them than a mad wildcat's."

The second half of the sketch, which breaks awkwardly, is equally graphic and vivid. It is an account of a hunt which the narrator himself made the next day with the old Arkansas bear hunter. The characterization of old Bob Herring is further elaborated. Bob Herring differs from the tall talking Big Bear, who is done in the Davy Crockett tradition. Instead, he is presented as an old squatter who has lived so long in the brakes that he has become "the ancientest inhabitant in the hull of Arkansaw." His presentation is an example of the close realistic portrayal of the backwoodsman.

In these few sketches Thomas Bangs Thorpe made his most memorable contribution to American literature. If the symbol of the American frontiersman was to function in the national consciousness as a useful controlling image, it had to be renewed from time to time by contact with reality. To whoever was interested, Thorpe was reporting what the

Western man was like. Natty Bumppo, as nature's nobleman, was too humble and yet too quaintly high-minded to be believable. On the other hand, the West was not wholly populated with the off-scourings of the East—thieves, murderers, and speculators. Somewhere between the extremes, a new image lay; and Thorpe, Longstreet, and others were helping to complete it.

The work of Thorpe, Longstreet, and their followers is the first developed realism in the national letters. These writers, some well-known, many anonymous, knew the frontier and backwoods at first hand. More importantly, they had the ability to give literary form to the life and the meaning they saw. The literature was born of the realities of its time and place. These Thorpe saw from the unique vantage point of his own education, which combined the traditions of the academic and the artistic. Thorpe's unique training, as well as his own personality, enabled him to make a peculiarly happy use of folkways and the folk art of the oral anecdote, which perhaps was nowhere more popular in the United States than on the Western frontier. Both Thorpe and Longstreet found their way into books which had a wide circulation in the country at large, and the two were followed by a host of others who established an extensive tradition which was to see its ultimate flowering in Mark Twain.⁴

3

During the years that Thorpe, his wife, and their little daughter lived in St. Francisville he seems to have been mainly dependent on his painting for income. At the time "The Big Bear of Arkansas" appeared in the *Spirit*, Thorpe was painting family portraits for Bennet Barrow. For Bennet's brother, William Ruffin Barrow, planter and owner of

⁴ Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (2 vols., New York, 1954), II, 172.

the great racehorse Josh Bell, he painted several oils. One, "A Louisiana Deer," was shipped to Porter in the fall of 1841 and engraved for the *American Turf Register* by A. Halbert to appear in November, 1842. At the same time Thorpe's "Mont Du Moss" was apparently purchased by Porter to hang in the office of the *Spirit of the Times*, which was becoming something of a Western and Southern museum.⁵

Some of Thorpe's pictures combined his interest in Southern and Western life with the same humor he showed in his literary work. One of them, painted at an undetermined time, is a genre piece commenting allegorically on frontier justice. S. G. W. Benjamin, in his *Art in America* (1880), recalling Thorpe's work as an animal painter, noted that in "such semi-humorous satires as 'A Border Inquest,' representing wolves sitting on the carcass of a buffalo, [he] struck a vein peculiarly American in its humor."

Early in January, 1843, the second annual fair of the Louisiana Agricultural and Mechanics [*sic*] Association was held at Baton Rouge, and Thorpe came down from St. Francisville to exhibit four of his oils. Two were portraits and two were animal paintings, one of a pointer dog and the other of a Louisiana wildcat robbing a partridge nest. As an animal painter Thorpe must have been self-taught, for the genre was unusual for the time. Thorpe won first prize for his work (not surprising as his were the only oils exhibited), and the local judges praised him in the *Baton Rouge Gazette* on January 21 for the excellence of the work and for choosing local subjects, "the illustration of which is eminently calculated, not only to teach our citizens the natural resources of Louisiana for the encouragement of the arts and sciences, but also to elicit the talent of her sons and daughters."

To make the occasion doubly significant for young Mr. Thorpe, who was a Whig like most of his planter friends,

⁵ *Spirit*, XI (July 10, 1841), 217.

Henry Clay was the distinguished guest, and Thorpe had a chance to meet the head of the party for which he was shortly to be making stump speeches.

Old Tom Owen, the subject of Thorpe's first sketch, was also present, having been hired by a planter to drive a wagon down from the Felicianas and tend a prize hog at the fair. When Tom was introduced he said, "Mr. Clay, you are a great man."

Mr. Clay murmured polite deprecation.

"And here is another great man," Tom continued, pointing to himself, thinking of his fame through Thorpe's story. Tom's meaning was explained to Mr. Clay.

But Tom was an American backwoodsman, one who could not flatter others nor praise himself without showing that neither social distinctions nor differences in accomplishment really meant anything. Humor was the vehicle to carry such delicate connotations, for the backwoodsman had no words for them. Still with the attitude of weighty meditation on the human condition, he turned to his animal:

"And here's a hog that will outweigh both of us," Tom Owen concluded.

Mr. Clay was said to have laughed.

Honor and prizes at the Baton Rouge fair and painting for the Feliciana planters did not, however, provide Thorpe with enough income for his family of three; and writing for the *Spirit*, however gratifying it may have been, did not advance the family comfort, for Porter paid his gentlemen amateurs nothing. Consequently, sometime early in 1843 Thorpe formed a minor connection with the New Orleans *Tropic*, a well-established Whig daily. Two sketches, "My First Dinner in New Orleans," and "The Louisiana Law of Cock-Fighting," first appeared in the *Tropic* and were reprinted about the country. But working for the *Tropic* offered no real opportunity either.

Later, in the spring of the same year, Thorpe undertook

a very unusual project: he attempted to establish in Louisiana a sportsman's journal appealing primarily to Southerners but perhaps aiming eventually at a national audience. The only record remaining of the ill-fated endeavor is a review of the journal, titled *The Southern Sportsman*, in the *Knickerbocker* for June, 1843. Lewis Gaylord Clark wrote that it was a large, handsome, and well-filled sheet, under Thorpe's editorial supervision. The journal, Clark felt, would please and do justice to the "home spirit of the South and Southwest." This, too, came to nothing, and before the spring was ended Thorpe had moved to another part of Louisiana to try once more to establish himself financially in his beloved South.

The Far West Letters

ALTHOUGH THORPE NEVER WHOLLY ABANDONED HIS PAINTING, he began in the spring of 1843 a career as newspaper editor which was to last almost 20 years, until his last opportunity for large financial success was destroyed by the Civil War.

By mid-June of 1843 Thorpe had left New Orleans and joined Robert Patterson as co-editor of the *Concordia Intelligencer* at Vidalia, Louisiana. He remained in Vidalia two years, managing a country newspaper and serving the town as postmaster. The birth of his son Thomas, in 1844 or 1845, urged him to activities financially more predictable than painting. His free-lance writing made the shift to newspaper work natural enough, and it may be that the chief assets he brought to the *Intelligencer* were his ability with the pen and his name and reputation as a humorist. And his appointment as postmaster at Vidalia on May 15, 1844, may well have been one of the rewards of his growing political activity.¹ Also by the summer of 1845 he had prepared his

¹ Post Office Records, National Archives, Washington, D. C. Thanks are due to the National Archives and Records Service for their letter of November 4, 1952, verifying the date of Thorpe's appointment.

first book for the press. Altogether the period is one of an increasing diversity of activity, which was henceforth to characterize Thorpe's whole career.

When Thorpe joined the *Concordia Intelligencer*, it was a superior country newspaper. When he left it, it was even better. Only a few scattered copies of the early issues remain, all in the Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University, but from them it is possible to reconstruct in general the few years of its history before Thorpe became associated with it. The earliest surviving numbers, for September, 1841, indicate that it had been founded the preceding June and was owned by B. C. Smith. Patterson later acquired the paper and was publishing it when Thorpe joined him in June, 1843.

The paper was a large, well-printed, four-page weekly. Its first prospectus stated that it was an "Independent Newspaper," devoted to "Agriculture, News and Literature." The prospectus of the third volume, which began at the time Thorpe associated himself with the *Intelligencer*, set forth in some detail the objectives of the paper:

This Journal is strictly neutral in politics and devoted to Literature, Agriculture, the dissemination of useful intelligence. . . .

As a Literary Journal, the *Intelligencer* will claim the attention of the reader, as it will be the object of its Editors to devote a large space of its columns to the current literature of the day, carefully avoiding that character of reading that combines only amusement, without utility; believing, as we do, that the region we live in offers as fine a field for useful literary labor, of a character original and peculiar to itself, and of local interest and importance to the community which is, we believe, vastly superior to the ordinary light literature of the day. . . .

The editorial declaration of neutrality in politics was unusual for the day, for most papers were violently partisan. The promises to print worthwhile news and items of interest in agriculture are understandable enough, but the interest

in literature was again something out of the ordinary, perhaps reflecting Thorpe's love of books and of Southern and Western tales.

Political independence was not at all impossible for a Southern newspaper in 1843, for the party lines had not yet been drawn on a sectional basis. Slavery and secession were not the paramount issues they were shortly to be. Louisiana, and the Southern states in general, had at this time a workable two-party system which achieved in the early 1840's a kind of equilibrium. The Whig party during the years of its origins, 1830-1835, was not much more in the South than an opposition party, hospitable to almost every anti-Jackson-Van Buren faction. While the South generally believed in a strict construction of the Constitution and maximum state control, the cotton interests everywhere benefited from the commercial facilities of the National Bank. In Louisiana the sugar planters could not have existed without the protection of the tariff advocated by Clay in his American System.² Thus while most newspapers were politically partisan, North and South, it was still possible for an editor to remain free of party allegiance and support or condemn policies on the basis of their application to his own locality. Such vigilance for the interests of the cotton planters of Concordia Parish and the surrounding country explains readily enough the *Intelligencer's* editorial of September 25, 1841, attacking Tyler's veto of the Bank Bill. Indeed, the varied social and economic groups of Louisiana gave the state a highly heterogeneous, complex, and sophisticated character not typically Southern.

The *Intelligencer* served an area almost wholly devoted to cotton planting, for its circulation was not limited to Concordia Parish, but extended west to Catahoula Parish, north through the present Tensas and Madison Parishes, and east into Mississippi in the area around Natchez. With the excep-

² Arthur Charles Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, 1913), *passim*.

tion of a very few French and Spanish landholders, the great planters of the area were Anglo-Saxon in background and Protestant in religion. Their specialization in cotton placed them among the large slaveholders of the time: the census of 1840 showed a white population for the parish of 1380, with 8003 slaves; and that of 1850 counted 832 whites and 6934 slaves. Topographically, the area is much different from the Felicianas. Concordia Parish is all flat delta land and swamp, and the village of Vidalia in 1843 was smaller even than St. Francisville. The post office of which Thorpe was shortly to become postmaster had only recently been established. In addition, the town had a court house and a branch of the New Orleans Mechanics & Traders Bank. For the rest, a few stores and a few raw houses straggled along its main street, which was either powdery dust or bottomless mud.

Actually there was little reason for the town to expand (and indeed it scarcely has), for it was located, as the mast-head of the *Intelligencer* weekly proclaimed, opposite the city of Natchez, which stood high on its bluffs eastward across the Mississippi. Here on green, rolling hills stood the magnificent mansions of a few more great slaveholders who, in defiance (or innocence) of western Europe's moral judgment, lived elegantly on the fruits of an anachronistic labor system and continuing exploitation of the soil, not quite observing, as the novelists would have us believe, the beautiful and symmetrical tennis-match rules of their social system.

2

As editor of the *Concordia Intelligencer* Thorpe found his next opportunity to report, this time satirically, on the Hunter, Nature Undefined, and the American Woodsman. The background for Thorpe's Far West Letters began in Scotland, where the sportsman Sir William Drummond Stewart, baronet, after travels in "Russia, Circassia, the

Holy Land, and Europe," conceived the plan of an elaborate expedition to the headwaters of the rivers flowing from the Rocky Mountains into the Mississippi. To finance the fantastic undertaking, Sir William sold Logiealmond, which was not entailed, for over a million dollars.³ By the winter of 1842-1843 he was in New Orleans, and there he met Thorpe, whose writings he knew, and asked him to accompany the expedition.⁴ Thorpe, writing for the *Tropic* at the time and perhaps already preparing for the move to Vidalia, had to decline, but George Wilkins Kendall, owner of the New Orleans *Picayune*, sent Mat Field along to report the expedition, which, led by William Sublette, started from St. Louis in May.⁵

Beginning in the April 29 *Picayune*, Mat Field's letters, full of the romance of the wilds, tales of heroic adventure, pathos, and picturesque scenery, recorded the progress of Sir William's fifty well-armed men. Then in the summer of 1843 Thorpe left Vidalia for a tour through the western Louisiana prairies.⁶ Thorpe's account of his trip, largely political, began appearing shortly, and then, to lighten the tone of the *Intelligencer*, he conceived the idea of a series of letters burlesquing Field's reports, purporting to be from a member of Sir William's party and yet playing on his own journey. He wrote, in a not very consistent Irish dialect, from the venerable comic point of view of the man whose every effort to be like his fellows is solemn, sincere, and abortive—his heroism degenerates into farce, his prudence

³ Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston, 1947), 363. The 1843 expedition was Sir William's fifth exploration of the Far West.

⁴ From the final page of a MS biography in the Duyckinck Collection, New York Public Library, possibly prepared by Thorpe himself for the *Cyclopaedia of American Literature*.

⁵ New Orleans *Picayune*, May 4, 1843. Field's reports have been published as *Prairie and Mountain Sketches*, edited by Kate L. Gregg and John Francis McDermott (Norman, Okla., 1957). See also McDermott, "T. B. Thorpe's Burlesque of Far West Sporting Travel," *American Quarterly*, X (Summer, 1958), 175-80.

⁶ New Orleans *Picayune*, August 2, 1843.

into baldest cowardice, and his sentiment into the ridiculous.

Because he was writing for the male audience of a country newspaper of the Southwest, Thorpe was free to make fun of the standard literary treatment of the adventurous life in the Far West. This he could do with precision because he knew the conventions well himself and had exploited in his *Knickerbocker* essays the genteel public's interest in the area and had satisfied its demand for pathos and sentiment. During the course of the dozen letters printed between the summer of 1843 and the early spring of 1844 he burlesqued the extravagant adventures of hunting in the wilderness and satirized several fashions of the time: the joys of outdoor life, the fabulous animals of the backwoodsmen, the noble savage, and the curio collecting of nature lovers and explorers.⁷ He captioned his reports "Letters from the Far West" and signed them "P. O. F.," initials he never explained.

The first letter solemnly describes the Crow Indians, comments on certain philological questions, notes the difficulties of traveling, and recounts anecdotes about various members of the expedition, including Audubon, who was, in fact, a member of the party for a while. He offered also an etymology of the sort dear to the traveler in strange lands: "The name 'Yellow Stone' is a corruption of the Indian title 'Yalhoo Stunn,' literally, 'the running water with green pebbles.' I got this information from a trapper who had resided several years above the Falls of St. Anthony on the Upper Missouri."⁸

In his second letter Thorpe begins his report of the Noble Savage: "We have had a great many savages with us one time or another, but most of them are more than half civilized, as they will get drunk and steal as quick as any

⁷ Only two of these letters are available in extant copies of the *Concordia Intelligencer*, one in the November 25 and one in the December 30, 1843, issues. All quotations from them are from the *Spirit*. The first letter was printed in the *Spirit*, XIII (August 25, 1843), 303.

⁸ *Ibid.*

white man I ever saw.”⁹ In the same letter Thorpe also described the Indian from his burlesque point of view of the romantic explorer, this time seeing the savage for the first time:

He was short and thick set, and smelt strongly of rancid bear's oil, which he used as we do cologne. . . . I took to him naturally; there was something that pleased me in his eye and the grateful expression of his face as I gave him a drink out of my canteen; I asked him if he had ever been in war? At the question he started back, placed himself in a most elegant attitude, a perfect representation of a corpulent Apollo, then tracing the sun's course with his finger through the heavens, he turned his face full towards me, uttered a guttural “ugh!” took a plug of tobacco out of my hand, stuck it in the folds of his blanket, and quietly walked out of my tent. . . . I never saw a more noble and beautiful exhibition of savage life.

The canteen which the Indian accepted with such happy alacrity was full of liquor, a wilderness custom the other letters refer to frequently. The fat warrior, whose name was Tar-pot-wan-ja, forthwith attached himself to Thorpe's imaginary expedition as official Noble Savage. For his services he and his squaw were fed, transported about the country, and, no doubt, entertained during the whole course of the adventure.

In a later letter the matter of the Indians was summed up in a sentence. The group was sitting around the campfire drinking, the customary nightly recreation, and the explorers began a series of toasts. The little Irishman's toast was to the wild Far West and its inhabitants: “The Indian hunting grounds—like the Indians themselves, more interesting in ladies' books than any where else.”¹⁰

Thorpe included in his letters many burlesques of the tall tale. One of these described how the noble carcass of a mighty buffalo was attacked by a vulture and two wolves, which, in their rapacity, pushed the corpse about so that it

⁹ *Spirit*, XIII (September 9, 1843), 333.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (November 18, 1843), 445.

rolled down a bank, killing the bird and pinning the two wolves to the ground with its horns. To complete the poetic justice of the fantasy, the two wolves bit each other's eyes out.

In the same letter another equally absurd tale was told of a buffalo which caught his hind foot behind his horn just as he was shot. As the hunters skinned him, the foot was dislodged, striking an Indian in the head and driving his scalp lock out his mouth. Needless to say, this killed the hunter instantly.

Both of the tales are so fantastic that they are merely ridiculous, and, like many similar pieces being printed in the newspapers of the time, quite lacking in point. The sketches satirize the tall tale neatly, revealing how the form could (and frequently did) degenerate into the telling of grotesque and absurd lies. Idle hunters spinning yarns around campfires did not always create symbolic and profound revelations of the folk mind.

An account of the correspondent's continued effort to kill a buffalo goes on through many of the letters. Early in the series one of the fabulous and mysterious animals of the great American wilderness was introduced. Crafty and evil bears with the intelligence of men, swift and beautiful white steeds, mermaids and mermen occur in the humorous literature of the 1840's, and on Sir William's expedition the little Irishman had his mind stuffed with tales of a mysterious one-horned buffalo. One morning, while out hunting, he thought he saw the mythical creature. He lay down, said his prayers, and prepared to die. Soon he felt the beast's single great horn thrusting him in the side, but hearing a human voice, he opened his eyes to see Sir William poking him in the ribs with the muzzle of his gun in preliminary diagnosis of his difficulty. " 'A gude mornin' to you, mon,' said he." ¹¹

The incident of the one-horned buffalo and other refer-

¹¹ *Ibid.* (October 14, 1845), 392.

ences to a Scotch fiddle are made in such an enigmatic manner that one is led to suspect that either the matters were a private joke or that they had some bawdy significance. But whatever other meaning the great one-horned buffalo might have had, on the surface he made material for a little jest at the fabulous folk creations of the American frontier.

Often Thorpe satirized quite directly Field's reports. Field's letter in the *Picayune*, July 30, 1843, reported happily that he wrote sitting at a fire of "famous Buffalo chips." He added that he had secured "but a few curious things in the way of flower, mineral, vegetable or petrification, but in notes of incident my journal is rich as cream."

Thorpe, who had himself hunted buffalo in north Texas, was amused at Field's solemn interest in the staggeringly commonplace Buffalo chip. The mania for collecting things, too, was a commonplace with frontier travelers. Sometimes the relics accumulated were valuable, as was George Catlin's collection, but more often they were conversation pieces with a dismally mnemonic function. So Thorpe had his imaginary little Irishman duplicate Field's experience:

I have got a real Indian tomahawk, that has been much used, as its appearance indicates. The history of the weapon is singular, as it once belonged to an old hunter by the name of "Collins," who seems to have originally come from "Hartford, Ct.," as he has cut his name on the side. I also have a very fine "Buffalo chip," which I had taken great care of, but having got my coat wet, it has injured it very much, and I shall have to look around for another specimen.¹²

Although here, as elsewhere, Thorpe was directly and specifically satirizing Field's letters, he usually had his imaginary correspondent choose typical samples of innocent (what a later time was to call "tenderfoot") conduct.

Throughout the letters Thorpe made much of the inconveniences and difficulties of outdoor life, the uncomfortable

¹² *Ibid.* (October 21, 1843), 405.

qualities of skin clothing, and scoffed at the idea that hunting expeditions were great fun:

The other night we sat out all night in the rain, as our baggage took the wrong fork, which is a greater mistake in the prairies, than taking a wrong tooth brush at a hotel. It would have done you good to see us enjoying ourselves out here, sitting Indian fashion, in a ring, soaked through and smoking all over, like rotten straw stirred up in a cold morning.¹³

Thorpe also satirized the American male's addiction to practical jokes by having "P. O. F." complain that he had been killed so often in fun that it would be a relief to be killed in earnest. This almost happened when a half breed who had joined the group lassoed and almost strangled "P. O. F." just to show his skill. "For the fifteenth time since I have been out here," he wrote, "I saw there was no use in being offended at merely being killed, if it was done in fun, so I joined the laugh."¹⁴

All of the events were told from the point of view of one who was eager to experience such difficulties in the belief that he was enjoying himself and seeing true Life and Nature. The attitude of explorers and innocent adventurers was not the only one burlesqued. Silly tall tales and interminable and difficult hunts were characteristic pleasures of many of the frontier settlers themselves. Altogether, the letters offer comments of a realist with a quick eye for the comic. Thorpe's bogus reports satirized with neatness and precision several prominent aspects of the literary attitude toward the frontier, as well as frontier adventuring and sports.

The style of the letters is often careless. The individual pieces are made up of odd anecdotes and comments, often without much unifying point. Furthermore, the point of view of the writer is inconsistent from letter to letter. Some-

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* (January 27, 1844), 569.

times he is the romantic adventurer in the Far West, sometimes he is the indefatigable hunter, and sometimes he is the comic little Irishman, prudent to the point of cowardice and infinitely pained to find his mother's son somehow abroad in the heathen wilderness. The dialect of the Irishman is not consistent in the individual letters but is merely used for its comic effect when it can be easily slipped in.

However, the letters did enjoy a great popularity in the newspapers, and were republished not only in the *Spirit* but also in other sheets about the country. Curiously enough, some of the journals accepted them as genuine reports, in spite of their fantastic content.¹⁵ Various qualities of the letters might deceive a reader: although they are burlesques, they did follow a popular tradition; each one was carefully dated from some place the expedition might have visited; anecdotes were told about Field, Sir William, and other actual members of the party; and the country was always described in detail. The New Orleans *Picayune* even charged that the *Spirit* had been deceived and roused Porter to a much sharper comment than was usual to his good nature:

Sold.—Somebody has been quizzing the editors of the "Picayune." Hear them:—

Our friend T. B. T. of the "Concordia Intelligencer" gets up his letters from the Far West very well, even for a backwoodsman. At the North they do not appear to take the joke. "The Spirit" has been "done brown" by him. They are cut by a saw of which T. B. T. possesses the exclusive patent.

So they don't take the joke at the North! Oh, no! We republish another of the letters today, from the "Intelligencer" and hope that "the Pic" will be able to publish some half as clever from its exclusive correspondent. No wonder they are horribly exasperated, in "the Pic" office, that people in the North will not "take the joke" of reading Mat FIELD's dull letters, when THORPE's are to be had at the same price. We recollect no Northern editor who has been sold so cheap.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (November 4, 1843), 426.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Field's letters were indeed dull, but Porter himself reprinted one of them,¹⁷ and it was unlike him to make so ungenerous a comment.

Field's reply to Thorpe's parodies of his letters reveals that the two were acquainted and, in spite of its exaggeration, is interesting for its account of Thorpe's appearance and personality.

The greatest genius we had among us was the poor little fellow with an awful face. He looked like an embodiment, in semi-human form, of a thick fog on the Mississippi, at half past three in the morning to a man who had just lost his last dollar at poker. . . . He was about 4 feet 4 in height. . . . He was decidedly brain stricken but quite amiable and harmless in his madness. . . . He was a dangerous wit. . . . But his grave and saturnine countenance quite belied a kind and playful spirit that seemed to live in light and loveliness beneath all the madness and gloom of his character.¹⁸

At the time Field wrote the sketch Thorpe was twenty-nine years old, a short, thick-set young man, with a big nose and a saturnine face. Field's reference to Thorpe's ugliness was in an old frontier tradition, a tradition honored as late as Lincoln's time. It was necessary for frontier heroes to have their ugliness, and Daniel Boone, Jim Beckworth, Davy Crockett and countless others were complimented with the attribution of fantastic ugliness.¹⁹ In 1853 Baton Rouge had its Ugly Club, and one of the members nominated his cab driver, who was found to be admissible, for "The independent order of the Ugly Club regards no man for his *internal* qualifications."²⁰ Thus the reference to Thorpe's ugliness could call attention to his big nose in truth but more broadly was the celebration of a convention of the time and an expression of masculine affection.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* (December 2, 1843), 471.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (January 13, 1844), 546. Reprinted from the New Orleans *Picayune*, December 2, 1843.

¹⁹ See Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America* (Cambridge, 1951), 93.

²⁰ Baton Rouge *Daily Comet*, January 12, 1853.

Behind Thorpe's habitually grave and even gloomy countenance played a quick wit, as Field noted, but more observers of his temperament commented on his nervousness and his habit of gentle deprecation of himself.²¹ His personality seems to have inspired a quick respect and affection among the men who knew him. Light and loveliness, in truth, did play beneath all the "madness and gloom of his character." His humor and satire, as the *Far West Letters* abundantly verify, were never harsh. Instead, Thorpe's humor seemed to arise from a bright and playful mode of address to experience, a quick sense of absurdity or incongruity, or an intellectual delight in playing unusual character and language against the standard symbols. Both his essays and his fictional creations show respect and love for the human character in its many manifestations of kind and condition.

3

In addition to the *Far West Letters*, Thorpe wrote a good deal of the ordinary material for the *Intelligencer*, much of it reflecting his own particular interests and some of it a little unusual for a country newspaper. An account of Wier's picture of the Pilgrims was reprinted from the *New York Aurora* with Thorpe's praise of the author of the criticism, whom he knew from his New York days.²² In another single issue appeared an article on flowers; two selections of comments by Samuel Johnson, one on letter writing and the other on flowers; and an account of William H. Prescott's progress with his *Ferdinand and Isabella*.²³ It cannot be stated with certainty that all of this is Thorpe's, of course,

²¹ *Knickerbocker*, XVI (November, 1840), 456. See also Porter's letter to Carey and Hart, dated New York, March 3, 1845. Original in the New York Historical Society Library.

²² *Concordia Intelligencer*, November 25, 1843.

²³ *Ibid.*, December 30, 1843.

but it is obvious that the paper had a distinctly more literary flavor after his association with it began.

In the December 30, 1843, issue appeared "The Way Americans Go Down Hill," an anecdote written by Thorpe after reading Howett's *Moral and Domestic Life in Germany*. The piece is an account of a wild ride down a steep mountain in the Alleghenies in a stage driven by some Jehu of the back country, probably based on the stage journey he described in his letter to John William Burruss in January, 1837. The essay opens in the leisurely, literary manner of Washington Irving, increasing its pace to the description of the terrifying ride, and closes by drawing the general conclusion that the impetuous and headlong rush and the desire always to be moving are American characteristics in sharp contrast to the careful, methodical travel habits of the Germans. Love of movement Thorpe observed elsewhere in writing about his countrymen and years later he quoted Emerson to the effect that Americans have "no repose of character."²⁴ Once more the essay reveals Thorpe's continual search for a definition of the American character, a question which his reading, experience, and observations stimulated time and time again.

The mention in this issue of the *Intelligencer* of Prescott, Johnson, and Howett, together with other chance references in his sketches, throws some light on the books and authors Thorpe read and enjoyed, although any reading list compiled in such a way is necessarily incomplete. Among the ancients he read at least Homer (in Pope's translation), Aristophanes, Herodotus, Pliny, and Strabo. Shakespeare, of course, he knew and referred to many times. Among the plays, he mentioned *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry IV* (he took a boundless delight in Falstaff), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Later in life he expressed pleasure in having seen

²⁴ New Orleans *Daily National*, November 26, 1847.

many of what he called the "Old English comedies," mentioning Ben Jonson, and Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. He knew Raleigh, Sandys, and quoted from *A Counterblast to Tobacco*. One of his essays contains a paragraph on the actors' use of wigs or their natural hair in various presentations of *A School for Scandal*. He seems to have been particularly fond of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Walton's *The Complete Angler*. Of Milton he knew at least the *Paradise Lost*. He read Addison, Swift, and Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Samuel Pepys he praised for his faithful recording; Collins and Shenstone, for their pastoral sweetness. He knew Coleridge, Lamb, Christopher North, Byron, Keats, and Shelley. Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* he quoted in letters to John Burruss in 1837. In later work he mentioned Wilkie Collins several times and read Eugene Sue's *The Wandering Jew* with pleasure. He read some of the science of his own time and enjoyed travel accounts and history, mentioning Prescott, Von Humboldt, Silliman, Audubon, and Wilson. Irving's and Cooper's works he knew with some intimacy, and he quoted from Emerson and Lowell in his own paper in 1847.

He was early acquainted with most of the writers of the Old Southwest through the daily newspapers and the columns of the *Spirit*. A few of the humorists were printed or reprinted in the *Intelligencer* while he was with it. In its columns "The Last Duel in Loaferville" by Obe Ilestone appeared originally, addressed to Robert Patterson. Thorpe himself wrote a piece for his paper revealing the identity of "The Georgia Major, Joseph Jones" as William Tappan Thompson, editor of the *Southern Miscellany* and friend and admirer of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet.²⁵ When John-

²⁵ *Concordia Intelligencer*, March 9, 1844. One line of development of the literature of the Old Southwest is neatly illustrated in the career of Thompson, who, after working with Longstreet on the *State Rights Sentinel* and modeling his own writing on the *Georgia Scenes*, was the man to introduce Joel Chandler Harris to the *Savannah News* in 1871. See DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*, 97.

son Jones Hooper's *Adventures of Simon Suggs* appeared in 1845, Thorpe praised him as a "talent of the first order."²⁶ He knew Sol F. Smith, author of the *Theatrical Apprenticeship*; indeed, he was acquainted with many of the popular writers and journalists of the day; he read the standard literary figures, as allusions in his writings show.

In the columns of the *Intelligencer* and in the work to follow, Thorpe rarely had occasion to mention his reading, but even a casual look at his literary knowledge reveals that it was rather broad. Thorpe's education, the breadth of his interests, and the quality of his writing all suggest the impropriety of treating him as a naïve artist.²⁷

Although he and other humorous writers of the period from 1830 to 1860 made use of folklore and recorded realistically many folkways, none of the major writers of the group could be called folk artists. A critical examination of their work from points of view other than that of the folklorists reveals the literary quality of their writing and its importance for the development of realism and local color in the literature of the United States.

In addition to the little Irishman of the Far West Letters, the *Intelligencer* had another imaginary correspondent during the time Thorpe was associated with it—one Stoke Stout, a backwoodsman who lived on the Bayou Chuc-A-Luck and wrote for the paper grossly misspelled accounts of his adventures and hardships. The first, entitled "The Way to Kill Wild Turkeys and Rheumatism," introduced Thorpe to the readers of the *Intelligencer*. "Stoke Stout's Adventures with Mr. Stiggins' Bull," dated Christmas, 1844, recounts the hoary rural situation of a man caught in a stream by an angry bull. The humor depends on situation, the countryman's foolishness, his ignorance of refinements, his combina-

²⁶ New Orleans *Commercial Times*, reprinted in the *Spirit*, XV (November 29, 1845), 471.

²⁷ See, for example, the treatment of Thorpe in *Literary History of the United States*, eds. Robert E. Spiller et al. (3 vols., New York, 1948), II, 721.

tion of shrewdness and naïveté, and his quaint spelling in his letters—this last device the beginning of an unhappy tradition in the national literature. None of the Stoke Stout letters are available in the extant copies of the *Intelligencer*; the *Spirit* reprinted only three, which are of little interest. Porter, in his *Big Bear of Arkansas*, attributed them jointly to Patterson and Thorpe, a reasonable enough explanation of their authorship.

For the *Intelligencer* Thorpe also wrote sketches and anecdotes of hunting, fishing, and outdoor life, most of them short casual pieces. One, entitled "A Tall Hunt—Crack Shot—Big Meat," tells the classic hunter's anecdote of the man who, after elaborate preparation and magnificent stalking, succeeds in bringing down an innocent old cow.²⁸ Another sketch, "Angling in Lake Concordia," praises the art of fishing and describes enthusiastically the beautiful country around Vidalia. These casual sketches for the *Intelligencer* all show the marks of haste in conception and execution. They are inferior to the work he did for the *Spirit*, the hasty journalism of a busy man. By the spring of 1844 Thorpe was not only doing his share in getting out the paper but had also received in May his appointment as postmaster at Vidalia. Further, he was increasingly active in the political affairs of Concordia Parish.

²⁸ My father, a good hunter himself, recently told me a similar tale. His version had it that the hunter was a citizen of Los Angeles, expensively equipped, the hunting ground the Double Bunk area of the Sierra Nevadas, and the victim the hunter's own saddle horse. The story is old, and perhaps often true.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Post Office Functionary

THORPE'S APPOINTMENT AS POSTMASTER AT VIDALIA IN May, 1844 (two months after his 29th birthday), was probably a reward for his faithful Whiggery in cotton-planting Concordia Parish and a recognition of his effectiveness as a politician. His ability and his amiable personality were gaining him many friends. Further, he was becoming news for the local press. The January 12, 1844, New Orleans *Picayune* noted Thorpe was in town, adding "In his external appearance, the 'Author of Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter' is little changed; in flow of conversation and felicity of conversation not at all."

In the same month he served once more on the Fine Arts Committee of the Baton Rouge Fair, where he judged paintings and ran into debt, he said, buying lottery tickets on a pair of lady's mittens.

In February he was again in New Orleans, one of a host of Whig editors, as the *Picayune* identified him, in spite of the *Intelligencer's* declaration of political neutrality. The

convention was addressed by Seargent [*sic*] Smith Prentiss and Henry Clay. Thorpe remained in town several days, meeting Whigs from various parts of the country and having his political witticisms recorded in the metropolitan dailies.

Then in June, after a trip by steamboat to St. Louis, he was back in Vidalia for the Concordia Parish Whig convention, which was to select delegates and plan strategy for the state convention to be held in the fall.

This state-wide meeting, held the following October at Baton Rouge, was a colorful and exciting affair. More than 10,000 Louisiana Whigs and national party dignitaries attended. On the morning of October 7, when the boats arrived from New Orleans, every Whig who was even portable was at the docks to meet them. Twelve steamers lay at the landing, decorated with flags and devices designed to assure election victories the following November by the sympathetic magic of their triumphant proclamations. Cannon roaring from the shore were answered by cheers from the densely crowded boats.

Meeting in mass convention later in the day, the Whigs of Louisiana elected officers for the forthcoming activity. Thorpe was chosen to serve as one of the three secretaries for the deliberations.

Among the resolutions adopted by the convention at Baton Rouge was one recognizing that the extension of the territory of the United States by the annexation of Texas was desirable, but opposing it ". . . unless it be compatible with the honor of our country and the stability of our Union."¹ This resolution recognized the South's desire to extend itself and increase its political power, but the Whig party did not wish to purchase the influence at the price of sectionalism and national division. The Whig party of the South was largely representative of the aristocratic planting and slaveholding class, placing the general stability of the

¹ Baton Rouge *Gazette*, October 12, 1844.

Union before narrow sectionalism, doing its best to avoid a break in the party on a regional basis.²

Thorpe's attachment to the party was strong. Socially he found the Whigs satisfying companions for one whose family background and education was that of a gentleman, as the age knew it, although his financial circumstances made him uncomfortable. He had formed personal alliances. His companions at college and his first acquaintances in the Felicianas had been the sons of planters and the planters themselves.

Then, too, he had been born, reared, and educated in the North, but had now lived for over seven years in the South, and was profoundly attached to his new home and friends. His love for the South, even during the painful days of the Civil War, never changed. Simply his personal connections in the two regions were sufficient to show him that neither the Northern Abolitionists who abhorred slavery nor the Southerners who supported it were evil men. In time he became convinced that the war grew out of a failure of understanding on both sides.

But meanwhile, the vast, uneasy problem was only beginning to form a national division. In the Whig Party, the party of compromise, Thorpe found much for which to hope. The October convention adjourned about sundown at the end of the week. Some of the delegations left the same evening, but those remaining to the end, among them Thorpe, met opposite the City Hotel, "where they were addressed by Messrs. Nichols and Sparks from Lafourche, Thorpe from Concordia, Guion from Vicksburg, and H. J. Sevier from New Orleans."³

Thorpe's address, his only recorded speech during the convention, was a concluding, minor exercise following talks by many more important figures. But for him the opportunity

² Cole, *The Whig Party in the South*, 114.

³ *Baton Rouge Gazette*, October 12, 1844.

to speak before both Louisiana and national Whigs marked a new point of achievement in his active political career.

The election which followed in November, 1844, was painfully close. Doubly painful it was to the Louisiana Whigs who lost, they charged, as a result of the voting frauds in Plaquemines Parish, across the Mississippi from New Orleans. The Baton Rouge *Gazette* reported the issue still in doubt on November 16, but what had happened at Plaquemines the editors already knew:

The returns from this state are yet incomplete. Several of the Red River Parishes are yet to be heard from. The contest has been a close one, and the result is still uncertain. The majority of the legal votes are certainly in our favor, and but for the immense frauds at Plaquemines our triumph would be decided. Plaquemines, according to the census of 1840, contained a male population over 20 years of age, of 538. In that year it gave 290 votes, and in 1842, 283, and now it gives over 1000. Comment is unnecessary. There is a crying evil somewhere; if the lows triumph by such means, they are welcome to the victory thus acquired. We have still some hope, however, of carrying the state by a small majority.

But the vote stood; the fraudulent maneuver was successful; and the Whigs lost the state. Unfortunately, no copies of the *Intelligencer* reporting the election are extant. Consequently Thorpe's reaction to so interesting and so early a lesson in politics is unknown.

2

Meanwhile Postmaster Thorpe, co-editor of the largest Louisiana paper outside New Orleans, Whig delegate from Concordia, secretary to the state convention, artist, and writer for London and New York sporting journals, added another activity to his list—he decided to try to publish a book. He first contracted with A. Ackerman of London, agent and publisher of sporting journals, to write 100 pages at a guinea a page, but the house failed financially before his

manuscript arrived. His agent then returned the packet unopened.⁴

During the same time, the winter of 1844-1845, William Trotter Porter was busy editing a volume which would pay Thorpe the compliment of using his "The Big Bear of Arkansas" as title story. Porter finished his preface in February, 1845, and the volume appeared in mid-May. Published by Carey and Hart of Philadelphia, the excellent little anthology was illustrated by Felix O. C. Darley, whose wit and sense of the comic made him the perfect illustrator for the unusual collection. The full title of the book indicated its general scope: *The Big Bear of Arkansas, and Other Sketches, Illustrative of Characters and Incidents in the South and South-West*. In his preface Porter outlined the history of this new literary genre. He pointed out that it was valuable both for its sporting tales and for its accounts of the characters and scenes of the American West. The strange new scenery of the Far West, the thrilling adventures the pioneers suffered, and the extraordinary characters and language which the new circumstances were creating were all recorded in the volume with happy vigor and characteristically American humor. Edgar Allan Poe, editing *The Broadway Journal* at the time, reviewed the volume. He thought Thorpe's sketch and one other ". . . much overrated by the editor—they seem to us dull and forced. Many of the others are irresistibly comic and fresh."⁵ Poe was not at his most competent when analyzing humor or the Western frontier character. Reviewers generally found the volume fascinating. Lewis Gaylord Clark in *The Knickerbocker* said the sketches were "not unworthy of HOOD or DICKENS." In putting the volume together Porter had feared it would be a little too frank in its language. He wrote Carey and Hart asking them to expunge,

⁴ Letter of Thomas B. Thorpe to Carey and Hart, March 8, 1845. The original is in the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

⁵ *The Broadway Journal*, I (May 24, 1845), 331.

alter or amend every "indelicate expression."⁶ But in spite of the vigor of its language (or perhaps because of it), the anthology was both a literary and a financial success.

Thorpe's own first step toward publication of a book in America was a letter to Porter, probably in February, 1844, asking for help and advice. He enclosed as a favor another sketch, "Little Steamboats of the Mississippi," for the *Spirit*. Porter acknowledged receipt in his March issue. He promised his help with the volume of sketches.

True to his promise and astonishingly prompt, Porter wrote his own publishers, Carey and Hart, the next day. He sent along Thorpe's letter with his introduction:

"Talking of guns!" I enclose you a note from T. B. Thorpe, Esq., the author of the "Big Bear of Arkansas." Thorpe is a man of decided genius. The "Big Bear" hardly gives one an idea of what he has done or is capable of. He is postmaster of Vidalia, Louisiana, (a little village opposite Natchez, Miss.)—editor of the "Concordia Intelligencer," and, by profession, a portrait painter. So see what you can do for him. He is as nervous as our friend Henry Inman, but like him is a capital good fellow. He is well known to "the press gang" on both sides of the Atlantic and every man who ever saw him will "go his death" on him. Some of his sketches of *scenery* in the great Valley of the Mississippi and of the "characters" encountered there are equal to anything in the language, in my humble opinion. You will see that, like many other young writers, he looks to "this child" as a sort of "literary godfather."⁷

Porter's warm and generous letter is an invaluable description of Thorpe. The reference to Thorpe's nervousness is unique, possible only, of course, in the frankness of a personal letter. The praise of Thorpe's genius and the reference to the affection he inspired in those who knew him recall the *Picayune's* praise of "friend Thorpe's" flow and "felicity of conversation."

Either Carey and Hart wrote Thorpe at once, or he had

⁶ Original letter is in the library of the New York Historical Society, dated February 14, 1845.

⁷ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1845.

written them directly and received their reply, for less than a week after Porter's letter, March 8, 1845, Thorpe wrote the publishers from New Orleans outlining in some detail his plans for the volume:

Gent.

Your letter was forwarded to me from my residence, Vidalia[,] and received by me this day, I hasten to answer it. I have made no definite arrangement regarding the publication of my sketches, and I wrote to Mr. Porter to see on what terms it could be done. A friend of mine who has interested himself much in my favor, has spoken to the Messrs. Appleton of New York and they have expressed a desire to have the M.S. I have waited to attend to the business personally, and no business arrangement of course could not [*sic*] to be completed.

The volume will be made up of most of my best articles published, corrected and made more perfect than they were as far as I have been able to make them, and then a series of sketches, which I have been engaged on, the last year and a half, among which there are some I believe to be superior in every way to any of my published articles. I would remark that I originally contracted to write for A. Ackerman of London "100 pages of writing" at one guinea a page, but the house failed before they arrived in London, and the gentleman who managed my business sent them back to me unopened, and I resolved then to publish them in this country and was glad they were thus returned. If it is proposed to illustrate these sketches I can furnish illustrations myself drawn from life and consequently correct, a thing not possible when attempted by northern artists unacquainted with this peculiar country. I would not, however, render any pictures unless they were expressed at least in the best style of Lithography. Six illustrations could be made on one stone, while a beautiful picture I have in my possession of "Tom Owen engaged in a Bee Hunt" as a frontispiece would complete the series. I do not mean I could draw the pictures on stone, but furnish the paintings to draw them from. If I should undertake this task, which I do not covet, I should expect that the correctness of the pictures would be their chief merit.

Owing to the derangement of business in this section of the country, I have had more leasure [*sic*] than heretofore to write and pursue the romantic history of this unknown country. At my leasure [*sic*] I have been engaged in a work intended when finished, to reach the size of two ordinary volumes. The book will

be illustrative of "Western life and manners" as exhibited in 1799 and 1800. I have so far progressed through half of the work and intend only to finish it after the greatest labor, and correctness, of those early times. The plan of the book is original in its character and peculiar, and occupies a ground untrodden by any writer, and only to be dealt fairly and truthfully, by one who has lived in the South and known it well. This work is to follow the "Tom Owen Sketches," provided its sale, and merit justifies its being finished, and offers inducement for further literary pursuits.

I shall be in Philadelphia in the [two words blurred] of May [or summer] with the M.S. of the "sketches" complete, and will wait on you at once relative to their publication and will have the illustrations as soon as wanted.

With great respect

Yours, T. B. THORPE⁸

Thorpe's intention for his first volume was that its sketches should present his readers with a true description of the scenery and occupations of the South and West—of "this peculiar country" which he found so unusual and so fascinating. Thus early he proposed, if he had leisure, to devote the greatest labor to writing correctly the history of "Western life and manners." His further work, he felt, would be "original" and "peculiar." His letter is almost evenly balanced between the discussion of his interests and intentions in writing and his concern for the quality and correctness of the illustrations. Obviously, he hoped his book would be both a literary and an artistic achievement.

Carey and Hart must have felt that there was sufficient interest in the Southwest and in Thorpe's work to justify such an edition as he proposed. They answered at once, sending him copies of one of William Tappan Thompson's "Major Jones" volumes, a "Peter Ploddy," and defending the quality of modern woodcuts as illustrations, which were less expensive than the work on stone Thorpe proposed.

⁸ Thomas B. Thorpe to Carey and Hart, March 8, 1845. The original is in the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

Thorpe replied from Vidalia on April 1, accepting the publishers' proposal that his volume be illustrated with woodcuts, explaining "my residence in the South has placed me behind the times in these matters, and you must therefore pardon my want of knowledge in the excellence of wood cuts in illustrating fine works." He asked that they send him a copy of Porter's anthology. He expected, he added, to be in Philadelphia by the 15th of May, "anticipating the pleasure of conferring with you respecting the publication of the sketches I am now engaged in writing."⁹

But Thorpe was delayed at Vidalia over an unhappy difficulty with Patterson about the policies of the *Concordia Intelligencer*. Rather suddenly, in the June 18, 1845, issue of the *Intelligencer* appeared the statement:

The partnership heretofore existing under the firm of Patterson and Thorpe as editors and proprietors of the *Concordia Intelligencer* ceased on the 20th inst. by mutual consent.

The charge of the *Intelligencer* will devolve upon Mr. Patterson, who has become sole proprietor, Mr. Thorpe will assist in the editorial department until the close of the present volume.

ROBERT PATTERSON
T. B. THORPE

Vidalia, June 21, 1845

Another letter dated June 21 was printed in the same issue, signed by Patterson, saying that his health had been "somewhat shattered" for some months past. The columns of the *Intelligencer*, the latter noted, had been filled with matters not properly suited to the usual miscellaneous character of the paper. A disagreement over the content may be safely inferred from this.

Elsewhere in the same unhappy issue Patterson printed another notice:

The assistance expected from Mr. Thorpe until the close of the volume—refers *only* to a series of letters promised by him on his route east: his connection *in all other relations*, with the *Intelligencer*, ceased on the 14th. instant.

⁹ Original in the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

The present "we" is alone responsible for the editorial matter that may fill the columns of the paper.

The number of the notices scattered throughout the single paper, and their peevish tone, show Patterson's anger, but the cause of the disagreement is never stated directly. Significantly, however, the New Orleans *Tropic*, for which Thorpe would be working within a year, is mentioned as a Whig paper, and Patterson's editorial for the strange issue of the twenty-eighth was one condemning "those whose aim is to monopolize and guide Public opinion."

It seems most likely that the partners quarreled over the political function of the paper, Patterson apparently resenting Thorpe's support of Whig principles. It is also possible that Thorpe's trip to New Orleans immediately following the breaking of relations with Patterson and the journey to New York within a very few weeks show some dissatisfaction with his opportunities at Vidalia and a desire on his part to find something else to do. Furthermore, on July 31, 1845, the period of his appointment as postmaster at Vidalia came to an end. He did not return to the little village across from Natchez.

During his last weeks with the *Intelligencer* Thorpe had written Porter of his plans to visit New York for the summer. Porter replied through the columns of the *Spirit*, urging jocularly that Thorpe arrive in time for the races so that he could pay his expenses. In mid-June Thorpe wrote again, complaining that he was still delayed at Vidalia and asking that Porter hold his mail at the *Spirit* office.

While in New York and Philadelphia in the summer of 1845 Thorpe completed the arrangements for the publication of his first volume. On August 25 he wrote to Carey and Hart from New York City, enclosing the final essays to complete the book. He also mailed two sketches of a bee he had drawn, with the request that one decorate the

title page and the other the first page of the "Tom Owen" story, which was to conclude the collection.¹⁰ The handsome little bees, reminiscent of Thorpe's first published sketch in the New York *Spirit of the Times*, were hopeful symbols of profitable industry.

This same August 25 letter also reveals that Thorpe had been in Philadelphia the preceding day but was disappointed in not seeing Mr. Hart. Thorpe added, however, that on his way back South early in September he would make another effort to see Hart. He had, he said, some "inquiry to make relative to business connected with 'literature?' of great Importance." Thorpe's contacts with the firm seem to have been carried on satisfactorily through the enterprising Abraham Hart.

Perhaps the packet also included the book's preface, for this, too, is dated August, 1845. In it Thorpe outlined the experience in the Southwest which had inspired his writing:

The Southwest, with its vast primitive forests, its beautiful prairies, and its magnificent rivers, presents exhibitions of nature before which the pilgrim from every land bows in wonder and awe. The author of this little volume has felt an inspiration among them, which was never called forth by the more merely beautiful and familiar scenery of the North.

Years since he was a stranger among the people inhabiting the Southwest, in pursuit of fortune and health. He found friends, and a hospitality as unbounded as their soil is prolific; and in the pleasant airs of the seasons, to which the rose turns its full-blown and blushing cheek in mid-winter, he found health.

After this friendly tribute to the beauty of the country and the kindliness and generosity of its people, Thorpe recounted briefly the history of his "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." Its success, he wrote, had encouraged him to continue writing at his leisure. Through it, he said, he learned that "there was an *intrinsic merit in the subjects* associated with the forests which took the place of style or manner of composition." Thorpe's disclaimer was partly the customary

¹⁰ Original in the library of the New York Historical Society.

modesty of his personality, but more significantly it was part of his romantic point of view. In many of his sketches he had worked carefully over the composition and style, but more often he wrote rapidly, depending on the interest of his unusual subject matter to assure the success of the piece. He never set himself any long and painstaking discipline in the art of composition. His writing he considered a leisure-time activity. Thus as a writer, sometimes brilliant, gifted, and always interesting, he remained in the final assessment an amateur.

The object of the volume, Thorpe concluded, was to give "to those personally unacquainted with the scenery of the Southwest, some idea of the country, of its surface, and vegetation." Many of the sixteen essays are nature studies, carefully done but from the twentieth-century point of view less interesting and certainly less significant than his studies of frontier character and action. Neither "The Big Bear of Arkansas," which had, of course, just appeared in Porter's volume, nor "The Devil's Summer Retreat in Arkansas" was reprinted. Revised versions of "A Piano in 'Arkansaw,'" "Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter," and "The Disgraced Scalp-Lock" make up all that Thorpe offered in illustration of characters in the Southwest.

More than half the essays express his interest in fishing and hunting. Several report unusual Southwestern sports. "Piscatory Archery" describes a method of fishing with a bow and corded arrow; "Alligator Killing" describes the appearance and habits of the great reptiles infesting the swamps of the lower Mississippi.

"Pictures of Buffalo Hunting" is one of the longest sketches in the book. It describes the animals, the methods the Indians used in hunting them, and finally recounts a hunting expedition Thorpe himself had taken into northern Texas. The description of the frontiersmen whom the party met is highly unconventional in its realism, not at all of a piece with the tone of most of the rest of the book.

On the confines of the buffalo hunting-grounds, migrated a family, consisting of a strange mixture of enterprise and idleness, of ragged looking men and homely women. They seemed to have all the bad habits of the Indians, with none of their redeeming qualities. They were willing to live without labour, and subsist upon the bounties of nature. Located in the fine climate of Northern Texas, the whole year was to them little else than a continued spring, and the abundance of game with which they were surrounded afforded what seemed to them all the comforts of life. The men never exerted themselves except when hunger prompted, or a spent magazine made the acquisition of "peltries" necessary to barter for powder and ball. A more lazy, contemptible set of creatures never existed, and we would long since have forgotten them, had not our introduction to them associated itself with *our first buffalo steak*.

Thorpe was making no attempt to be humorous in the essay, and the image he strikes represents the obverse of the more romantic pioneer idealized by Cooper and followed as a cliché in the popular magazines. Thorpe never consciously worked out for himself his own modification of the romantic theory of the influence of the frontier on American character and life; instead, he apparently observed as a careful and interested reporter the hunters, squatters, and frontiersmen he encountered in the Southwest. He searched for the romantic Westerner but reported realistically what he found. Thus his artistic creations of character differ one from another, according to his experience, and are highly individualistic.

The same sketch continues with a realistic description of the circumstances of at least one family on the north Texas frontier in the early 1840's. The unusual fidelity of the piece (except for its misunderstanding of the climate) makes it a valuable study of frontier life. The hunters learn there is a "squatter" home in the vicinity and approach it looking for a comfortable shelter:

A large rudely-constructed shed, boarded up on the northern side, was all we found. Upon nearer examination, it appeared that this "shed" was the common dwelling-place of the people

described above, with the addition of two cows, several goats, poultry, and, as we soon after discovered, three horses. Immediately around the caravansera [*sic*] the prairie grass struggled for a sickly growth. As you entered it, you found yourself growing deeper and deeper in a fine dust, that had been in the course of time worked out of the soil. Some coarse blankets were suspended through the enclosure, as retiring rooms for the women. On the ground were strewn buffalo skins, from which the animal inhabitants kept aloof. We entered without seeing a human being. After some delay, however, a little nondescript, with a white sunburnt head, thrust aside the blankets, and hallooed out, "They ain't injuns." The mother then showed herself. She was as far removed from feminine as possible, and appeared as unmoved at our presence as the post that sustained the roof of her house. We asked for lodging and food; she nodded a cold assent and disappeared. Not disposed to be fastidious, we endeavoured to make ourselves as comfortable as possible, and wait for the development of coming events. In the course of an hour a woman younger than the first made her appearance, somewhat attractive because younger. On hearing the detail of our wants, she wrinkled her soiled visage into a distorted smile, and told us that the "men" would soon be home with "buffalo meat," and then our wants should be attended to.

Thorpe and his companions awaited the coming of the hunters, whom they imagined to be tall, active men riding wild steeds, but the reality was again disappointing. "Two short, ill-formed men, with bow-legs, long bodies, and formidable shocks of red hair, destitute of intelligence, clothed in skins, and moving with shuffling gaits, were the realities of our conception." Thorpe's comments on the frontiersmen are particularly interesting because he was well-read and very aware of the literary conventions of his day. Thus his observations consciously place the reality against the myth.

Yet at the same time, probably in his desire to make his volume a financial success, he used many of the romantic conventions of frontier life. For example, the concept of the Noble Savage, in spite of his ridicule of the idea in the *Far West Letters*, is offered gravely to the public. During

the buffalo hunt with the two shaggy squatters a group of Indians joins the party. The first sign of one of the savages is his cry:

It was a joyous whoop, and vibrated through our heart; we looked up, and saw just before us a young Indian warrior, mounted upon a splendid charger, rushing across the plain, evidently in pursuit of the retreating buffalo. As he swept by, he threw himself forward in his saddle, placed his right hand over his eyes, as if to shade them from the sun, making a picture of the most graceful and eager interest.

The cliché is total, even to the convention of the pose. After the description of the picturesque Noble Savage is complete, another is added, intended apparently to suggest the sensibility of the child of nature to the death of his prey:

The Indian dismounted and stood beside the buffalo the instant he fell. There was a simplicity and beautiful wildness about the group that would have struck the eye of the most insensible. The shaggy and round appearance of the dead animal, the healthy-looking and ungroomed horse, with his roving eye and long mane, and the Indian himself, contemplating his work like some bronze statue of antique art.

An illustration for the scene is provided by Darley, possibly from one of Thorpe's sketches, showing the gentleman hunter, mounted, in English hunting coat and cap, in the background; the Noble Savage with Grecian pose and melancholy face, musing over the buffalo; and finally, the poor-white squatter lending his baggy contrast to the tableau.

In fairness to Thorpe it must be observed that such scenes no doubt did strike his eye as graceful and picturesque. But from the historical and critical point of view, the Noble Savage had already become a sadly empty cliché. Thorpe was merely celebrating a convention.

However, use of the romantic and the sentimental make up a good part of the book. Obviously Thorpe hoped to

describe faithfully the country, people, and customs of the Southwest, but because he wanted his book to have a successful sale, he offered most of his material in terms acceptable to the polite reading audience of his day.

For his title, Thorpe chose *Mysteries of the Backwoods*, using the word *mystery* not only in its sense of something secret or unknown but also in the archaic sense of a craft or trade. Although ambiguous and bookish, such a title was appropriate to a volume devoted largely to the unique woodcraft of the Southwestern frontier.

Thorpe's friends encouraged the publication as they could. In mid-November the actor, playwright, and manager Sol Smith wrote Carey and Hart from New Orleans to report that he had just had a long visit with Thorpe. Thorpe was pleased, Smith said, with Darley's illustrations for the book. For himself he asked when the volume would appear.¹¹ Porter published a notice in the November 22 *Spirit* that he had the title page of Thorpe's book, which promised "a rich treat upon its appearance."

The Carey and Hart record books show that on November 22 they paid the initial cost of \$760 for an edition of four thousand copies. The first edition of Porter's *Big Bear of Arkansas* had also been four thousand. So substantial an edition for a new author is evidence that the publishers were satisfied with the book's merits and appeal.

In general, the reviewers spoke well of the work. Lewis Gaylord Clark, in his January, 1846, *Knickerbocker*, wrote that many of the sketches had already attained a wide popularity. "It [the book] is replete with rare felicities of description, and has altogether the effect of a fine painting."

De Bow, in his *Commercial Review* published in New Orleans, wrote, "The present work of Mr. Thorpe is in a lively vein, and happily takes off many of the scenes of Western life, and the rare peculiarities and originalities of Western manners. It is always gratifying to mark an

¹¹ Original in the Ford Collection, New York Public Library.

increase of good writers among us, and we hail Mr. Thorpe in that class." ¹²

These notices in the *Knickerbocker* and *De Bow's Review* were like the others to follow, recognizing that the work was skillfully done and somewhat unusual in its subject matter. Unfortunately, what was most excellent in Thorpe's writing—his ability to satirize the conventions of frontier writing and his humorous and realistic delineation of frontier characters and incidents—he had omitted almost entirely, probably because he considered such work a sub-literary form. But he had attempted to gratify to some degree what he conceived to be the demand of genteel readers. The book was out, and its reception was yet to be seen.

¹² *The Commercial Review*, I (February, 1846), 191. See also *Southern Quarterly Review*, IX (April, 1846), 528-29.

New Orleans Dailies and the Mexican War

RETURNS FROM THORPE'S FIRST VOLUME WERE SLOW. He found himself, during the two years following 1845, with little time for writing more fiction or even for painting. Under the pressure of the necessity to support a growing family—himself, his wife Maria, his daughter Anna, and now his infant son Thomas—he began to turn, reluctantly, from literature and painting to journalism. Neither his venture with the ill-fated *Southern Sportsman* nor with the *Concordia Intelligencer* had been successful, but he was growing in experience. He hoped that by devoting himself energetically to the business of publishing and editing a newspaper he could make his fortune. Perhaps he had hopes, too, that his activity in and devotion to politics would be rewarded.

Consequently, Thorpe continued for two more years trying to establish himself as a newspaper editor, two years of such rapid change and movement that he edited or

published during the period no fewer than four papers. Three of these he seems to have established himself.

By September 20, 1845, Thorpe had left New York, for on that date Porter published in the *Spirit* a note that he was remailing several of Thorpe's letters to New Orleans. Meanwhile, another of Porter's correspondents from the Southwest, Colonel Charles F. M. Noland, lawyer, member of the Arkansas Legislature, and editor of the Whig Batesville *Eagle*, heard that Thorpe was establishing a paper and wrote Porter to ask about the progress of his fellow correspondent and political ally. Porter inserted a note in his column on November 15 to say that Thorpe's *Commercial Times* was daily expected to appear. One week later Porter announced, "Thorpe is out already with his *Daily Commercial Times*, in the same city (New Orleans)—a large, elegant sheet, we are told. . . ."

Neither the New Orleans nor the Baton Rouge libraries have copies of the paper from the period of Thorpe's editorship. In the New Orleans Public Library there are two bound volumes, one for the first half of 1848, and the other for January and February, 1849. The numbering of these indicates that the paper was established in November, 1845, just as Porter's notice reveals.

The paper's title suggests that Thorpe planned to give special attention to New Orleans' business life, for the city was a thriving and busy port for both inland and ocean-going transportation. The issues extant substantiate the supposition, for they are made up largely of advertising, commercial directories, commercial and financial reports, and import and export statistics.

The founding of a new paper in the middle forties did not require great financial investment. Only the larger journals had rotary power-driven presses. For the smaller ones, the type was set by hand from two or more compartmented cases. Once set, the type was locked into

frames. From these the sheets could be printed by a hand-operated press. Such equipment could easily be bought at second hand from defunct sheets or, more often, from established papers wishing to improve their appearance with fresh, new type. Advertisements offering type and other equipment appeared frequently in the columns of the time.

The period from November, 1845, to April, 1846, marks Thorpe's only connection with a financial journal. Probably he found it not the kind of career to which he wished to devote his life. It seems to have been a simple business venture from which he hoped to get a comfortable reward.

Although his new paper was primarily financial, Thorpe did not restrict its contents to business news. Shortly after it was founded, the *Spirit* republished from its columns an essay evaluating Johnson Jones Hooper as a writer.¹ The essay welcomes Hooper's contribution to "the infant literature of the Southwest" and praises his talent as of the first order. Thorpe notes that Hooper's ability to evoke the pathetic reveals a "genius which, if cultivated, would attract lasting attention." Thus Thorpe implies that the popular romantic tradition was worthier as literature than the humor and realism of the Old Southwest.

Thorpe's recognition of Hooper's ability, in spite of the reservations about the type, is discerning criticism. Hooper had begun his sketches in *The East Alabamian*,² and the first of them, "Taking the Census," Porter had recognized at once as belonging rightfully to the fresh, new literature of the frontier. He had reprinted it in the *Spirit*, September 9, 1843. Later, in December of 1844, Captain Simon Suggs of the Tallapoosa Volunteers, Hooper's superb creation, had appeared in *The East Alabamian* in the first of a series of sketches destined to be printed in book form in less than a year.

Thorpe said of the book in his review that it was a

¹ *Spirit*, XV (November 29, 1845), 471.

² William Stanley Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs* (University, Ala., 1952), 46.

curious work. So it was, for it introduced to American literature the first elaborate portrayal of the Southern poor-white. Yet Suggs was no listless squatter, but a picaresque hero³ in the Spanish sense, a rogue who stood somewhere between William Byrd's stupid and apathetic Lubbers and the poor but heroic Davy Crockett. The Big Bear of Arkansas hunted and farmed. Suggs lived by his wits. He lied, he cheated, he stole, he worked his wife and family and consistently lived up to his motto—"It is good to be shifty in a new country."

Suggs is one of the workless ancestors of William Faulkner's Anse Bundren and of Erskine Caldwell's Jeeter Lester. His existence testifies to the vigor of the new literature of the Southwest and to the variety of types it could produce.

Thorpe's review of Hooper's book shows his continued interest in the literature of the Old Southwest, but conducting a daily commercial paper left him no time for literature. He grew increasingly discontented. Within a very few weeks, too, it became apparent that his income from the paper was less than that for which he had hoped.

While Thorpe was in Philadelphia in the summer, Abraham Hart had made him some kind of offer to work for the publishing firm of Carey and Hart. Now, as the *Commercial Times* grew increasingly unsatisfactory to him, Thorpe began to consider other possibilities. He seemed to feel that his life had reached some kind of a crisis. He even began to consider moving from the South, where the climate had brought him health, where he had begun his career and his family, where he had lived almost ten years with much content.

³ Shields McIlwaine, *The Southern Poor-White* (Chicago, 1939), 48, suggests the comparison. His comments are most discerning. See also Frank T. Meriwether, "The Rogue in the Humor of the Old Southwest" (Doctoral Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1952).

Finally, early in December he wrote Abraham Hart a long letter, several sheets written in great haste, pouring out his circumstances, his discontent, his hopes, and goals. The letter is one of the few extant intimate revelations of Thorpe's private life:⁴

New Orleans, Dec. 5, 1845

Mr. Hart

Dear Sir

I Spoke to you last summer relative to becoming a citizen of Philadelphia. You made me some very kind offers of which I have thought much since, and from circumstances which have since transpired, I wish to allude to them again. When in Phil^a a city I like very much, or think I should like very much, I presumed that I had made such arrangements in N. O. as rendered my removal from the South impossible but I find such is not the case and that my engagements are limited to time and under my control. I only consented to undertake the conduction of a daily paper because it I presumed would prove very profitable, but I do not find that I can command what I wish, and therefore I may at some future time if events warrant it, quit an enterprise *that entirely sacrifices my time to business, disconnected in every way with Literary pursuits*, a sacrifice I am not yet prepared to make. [Two words illegible] should if connected with the press in the South be owner or part owner of the establishment I am connected with, and before I begin so important an undertaking on my own responsibility, an undertaking *which if once commenced locates one permanently in the South*, I wish to know if your kindness will permit, what I could do in Philadelphia, and then having both prospects before me act decidedly and promptly and bend all my energies to [the extent?] I propose to do. I must honestly confess Mr. Hart that I am much disposed if possible to devote myself to literature wholly and do nothing else. [A sentence follows with several illegible words.]

Taking the liberty of speaking of myself I would say that I believe I have a great deal of judgment with regard to books that will please the public without sacrificing anything to depraved taste. I feel very competent to compile books, select popular subjects, and myself [?] introduce formally to the world any enterprise you may wish to present to the public through the press. In these particulars I must [?] yield to none. I also feel

⁴ Original in the library of the New York Historical Society.

satisfied that I would be successful in conducting [?] "Rambler and rambles" everywhere and as I am able to illustrate my own works I could if in Texas, Mexico or anywhere else do much to add to the value of my writing by such sketches. I have now in hand three [?] half finished literary enterprises which need but the time to complete. In winter if I should come north I would occasionally go abroad to relieve myself of the effects of a cold climate and spend the winters in such a way as would result in making a book, in this manner your advice would of course be of all service. Finally if I should come north I would wish by industry to acquire a competency, a position in society, and whatever else pertains to a gentleman. I should prefer to be entirely attached to your house, being willing to make such arrangements that afford me a certain remuneration, [?] instead of haphazard business. If I should enter into a business arrangement, it would be with a determination to succeed and if possible to excel in Literature and usefulness to your establishment. If as a result of this you will give the subject your serious consideration and write me what I can probably accomplish, and certainly expect as far as my arrangement with your house is concerned, I shall be most happy and will shape my business here according to your answer. For reasons which you will appreciate, I do not wish it known I ever speculate upon leaving the South, until I resolve to do so, it would injure me here if I should not go very [illegible word] among my friends. I would observe that I could always command the Southern and Western press, and that [several words illegible] could be made serviceable to you. I could visit all the cities on the route, and attend to your business in each. More particularly in the Valley of the Mississippi, the towns on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers—I should also say that my long residence in the South has given me a command of incidents, scenery, etc, that would give me an advantage over any writer superior to me in other respects in details of the Southwest. Wishing not to impose [?] upon your time.

I am your obliged Servt.

T. B. THORPE

Messrs

Carey & Hart, Philadelphia

I return by the mail the volume of "Mysteries," marked on the margin. Some few typographical errors have occurred not of serious importance save one or two. I am pleased with the book as a whole and shall do all in my power to give it circulation in

the South. I hope no paper or paper [?] will publish an unfair prospective [*sic*] in their [*sic*] columns. This is an evil which publishers should impress [?] on newspaper publishers—Mr. Lester almost published all that was highly interesting in his [title illegible]. I feel that such things in press are a mistake. I trust I shall be able to send you the second volume soon. I write [several illegible words] all the leisure I can command from the editorial conduction of a *Daily paper*.

Thorpe's long letter, frank and personal in tone, is a singular revelation of his hopes. Newspaper publishing provided him a living, though at an unsatisfactory standard, but with his first book just off the press he hoped to make writing his career. Underlining for emphasis, he writes that conducting a daily paper "*entirely sacrifices my time to business, disconnected in every way with Literary pursuits,*" adding that he is not yet resigned to such a "sacrifice." Later, he writes again that, if he takes a place with Carey and Hart, he is determined to "succeed and if possible to excel in Literature and usefulness to your establishment," significantly placing "Literature" first. Again, at the end of his postscript, he complains that conducting a newspaper leaves little leisure for his next book. Both his temperament and his training made him a lover of literature and of art. Now, after having produced much work giving him a growing reputation as a brilliant writer on Southwestern scenes and characters, he began to hope with some passion that what had been his avocation might become his vocation.

But editorial work for a publisher and commissions to write travel sketches would be impossible unless they brought financial security. Here was the difficulty: writing demanded leisure, yet he was altogether dependent on his daily work for his income. Again the vision of the gentleman's place in society rose before him. He repeated the motive he had expressed to John William Burruss in 1837 in his hopes for his move to the South. "Finally if I should come north I should wish by industry to acquire a competency, a position in society, and whatever else pertains to

a gentleman." Could one *be* an artist and *live* like a gentleman, North or South?

Thorpe's temperament did not dispose him to feel the alienation and despair that Poe felt, another American without a competency who wished to be an artist and a gentleman. Thorpe merely increased the tempo of his activities and movements—he gave the American answer. He hoped, he expressed expectations in his letters, he worked, he made necessary compromises, he sacrificed repose (which he valued). But the impulse to invention, the vision of the frontier character, the creative spark which had illuminated "The Big Bear of Arkansas" began to fade.

2

As 1846 began, Carey and Hart sent Thorpe a check for two hundred dollars for the *Mysteries*. He wrote thanking them; the letter went astray; on January 28 he wrote again. The publishers had asked about his second volume of sketches, and he replied saying he found almost no time to write. Instead, conscious as always of the symbolic value of the Far West, he wrote that he had bought a manuscript about California and was rewriting it. He praised his friend Sol Smith's new volume, *Theatrical Apprenticeship*. Finally he noted that Porter had complained in the current issue of the *Spirit* that he had not seen Thorpe's volume, which, Thorpe observed "is strange indeed. He has been much censured here for his appearant [*sic*] neglect of "Tom Owen."⁵ The circulation of the book depended to a great extent on the notices it received in the press, and the many sketches Thorpe had written for the *Spirit* entitled him to expect that Porter would do much through his paper to encourage the sales of the volume.

As spring drew near in New Orleans, bringing warmer weather and the rains, Thorpe received a reply to his

⁵ *Ibid.*

letter asking about a place with the firm of Carey and Hart. Their letter contained disappointing news about the sales of the *Mysteries of the Backwoods*. On March 2 he replied, thanking them for their consideration of his welfare. If Abraham Hart did make an offer in his letter, Thorpe apparently felt it was one he could not entertain, for his answer expressed only appreciation for Hart's concern.

He confessed surprise at the small amount of interest his little book had created in the North, observing it seemed to sell well enough in New Orleans. But he was not dissatisfied with his essays. He writes, "The book contains I predict some standard literature and it will not be ephemeral in its character." ⁶

By this time, too, he had come to the conclusion that the title was unfortunate. He would himself do what he could to promote the sales of the work. Again he mentioned Porter's neglect of the volume, expressing his puzzlement: "I cannot understand why Mr. Porter has treated me so shabily [*sic*] with regard to my book, if it is because I paid him no compliments in the volume, and I see no other reason, he is not the man I gave him credit for, anyway, he has disappointed me. I had reasons to *expect much* from his paper and have received nothing."

Considering all the writing Thorpe had done free of charge for the *Spirit*, his disappointment was justified. In fairness to Porter it should be observed that Carey and Hart apparently failed to send him a copy for review. Henry William Herbert, in a letter to Hart on April 25, wrote, "If you have not, pray *do* send a copy of 'My Shooting Box' with my regards to Park Benjamin and to Charles King of the New York Courier and Enquirer, and don't forget Bill Porter, as you did in the case of 'Tom Owen.'" ⁷ Porter might have exerted himself for Thorpe enough to send for the volume, but his explanation to

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Thorpe of what occurred was sufficient, and their friendship continued unbroken.

The perceptive Abraham Hart also pointed out to Thorpe that his best and most popular work was humorous, and he suggested that Thorpe make his next book a series of humorous sketches. To this wise suggestion Thorpe quickly acceded: "My next volume shall be as you propose, composed entirely of *humorous sketches*, and nothing else." Thus wisely redirected and recognizing the justice of the suggestion, Thorpe now needed only time to continue his work.

3

When Thorpe wrote his publisher in December, 1845, he was considering two possibilities: either moving to the North or staying permanently in the South to become part owner of a newspaper himself. The second course would sacrifice his leisure to write, but it would allow him to remain in Louisiana, which he loved. Further, editing and owning a Southern newspaper seemed to offer both the financial "competency" Thorpe desired and a position of influence in Louisiana politics.

On April 2, 1846, the New Orleans *Daily Tropic*, a large and influential city daily, announced that one of its former owners, Benjamin F. Flanders, local high school principal and strong Union Whig, had sold his interest in the paper to T. B. Thorpe. Two other owners, Sawyer and Hall, remained to conduct the paper, with Thorpe an equal copartner from April 1.

The *Daily Tropic*, in which Thorpe had now invested whatever he could command, numbered among the city's well-established dailies. It was not as lively a paper as the New Orleans *Picayune*, nor did it have the many strategically placed correspondents of Kendall's paper,⁸ but it

⁸ See Fayette Copeland, *Kendall of the Picayune* (Norman, 1943), 121-39.

did have a fair number itself. Although devoting somewhat less space to the news than the *Picayune*, which was among the best papers in the United States at the time, the *Tropic* compared favorably in content and format with the large city dailies of its period anywhere in the nation. It was a well-printed, eight-column, four-sheet paper, with the editorials and news appearing on the inside of the first page, as was the custom of the time.

It was somewhat younger than the *Picayune*, having been established on October 3, 1842. Between that time and April, 1846, it had had several editors and proprietors. It was a Whig paper from its beginning, but after the Plaquemines frauds it began to advocate stricter naturalization laws, called for the formation of an American party in Louisiana, and in December of 1844 changed its name to the *Daily Tropic and American Republican*. In January, 1846, just before Thorpe joined it, it had returned to its shorter title and was subsequently an undeviating Whig organ.⁹

Porter greeted the announcement of Thorpe's affiliation with the *Tropic* by expressing regret that he did not give up "the drudgery of the daily press," and devote his time entirely to his essay writing and his painting—advice Thorpe would have indeed been pleased to follow. Porter's notice was kind enough, but still it did not recommend Thorpe's book, which continued to sell slowly.

The *Tropic* had a daily and a Sunday edition, and Thorpe's interest extended to both. The first issue to be published after his association with the paper, that of April 2, contained an editorial supporting the common schools, which had been established in New Orleans after the state enabling act of 1841. The essay is unsigned, but it

⁹ Louisiana Historical Record Survey, *Louisiana Newspapers, 1794-1940* (Baton Rouge, 1941), 123. See also Leslie Norton, "A History of the Whig Party in Louisiana" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1940), 245, 272.

represents one of Thorpe's continuing interests, as his subsequent career was to show. The essay may well be his first contribution to the paper which he now partly owned.

For the next few weeks no material identifiable as Thorpe's was printed, as the editorials and news items commonly carried no by-lines.

Meanwhile, the Mexican War had broken out, and within about seven weeks the *Tropic* announced that T. B. Thorpe had left for the army on the Rio Grande, then under the command of General Zachary Taylor.¹⁰ Thorpe, according to the item, went as bearer of dispatches from General Edmund P. Gaines to General Taylor. Thorpe would furnish the latest war news directly from the front for the *Tropic*. He was referred to as Colonel Thorpe, probably a state militia title.

When the Mexican War began in May, 1846, the telegraph extended south only as far as Richmond, and the journals of the North had to get their reports largely from the newspapers near the action—that is, the New Orleans papers. Frank Luther Mott in *American Journalism* says that the war actually marked the beginning of the techniques of reporting swiftly and fully the events of international conflict. George Wilkins Kendall of the *Picayune* had his own ax to grind, for he had been a member of the Santa Fe expedition of 1842 which had been captured by the Mexicans and marched overland to Mexico City to be imprisoned. Spurred by both a personal and a reporter's interest he was one of the first to leave for the front, riding four hundred miles across country to arrive at Point Isabel on the Rio Grande June 6.

Thorpe, traveling by ship from New Orleans with other Louisianians, arrived at Taylor's headquarters near Matamoros late in May or early in June. In addition to carrying dispatches from General Gaines, Thorpe had been commissioned by a group of Louisianians to present to

¹⁰ New Orleans, *The Daily Tropic*, May 21, 1846.

Taylor the military sash worn by General Edward Braddock at the time of his death. Two delegations of Louisiana citizens called upon Taylor at the same time—Thorpe with the sash, another with a golden sword and other things. Taylor refused the gifts until the end of the campaign, saying that if he then felt he deserved them, he would acknowledge their receipt.¹¹ Privately, Taylor expressed the opinion that the Louisianians were “a high set of gentlemen,” basing his observation on their ways with the champagne and food at his tent, adding “some of them have been on a frolic pretty much ever since they have been here.”¹² Thorpe’s pleasure in the fleshly amenities makes it reasonably certain that he took his part in the frolic. Later he was to write approvingly of the beauty of the Mexican women, who were “superior to the men, both in body and mind,” but whether his generalization arose from observation as artist, historian, or as one of “a high set of gentlemen” cannot be told.

But all was not frolic at Matamoros, for Thorpe was busy gathering reports for his paper. His first dispatch, with the by-line “Editorial Correspondence,” appeared in the June 6 *Tropic*, apparently prepared on board ship on the way down to Mexico. Titled “Episode in the History of Our Army of Occupation / No. 1, Captains May and Walker,” the dispatch is really a hastily written essay in praise of the two officers and is rather more of an expression of enthusiasm and sentiment than the factual reports Kendall was sending back for the *Picayune*.

For the next few weeks the *Tropic* continued to print a great deal of war news, for although the Whig papers of the North, and of New England particularly, opposed the war, the Whigs of the South, once it was started, supported it with the most extravagant enthusiasm. Other

¹¹ Thomas B. Thorpe, *The Taylor Anecdote Book* (New York, 1848), 17–18.

¹² Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor* (New York, 1941), 197.

than the items marked "Editorial Correspondence" Thorpe's work cannot be identified in this material.

Thorpe did not spend many days at the front, where the Mexican Army of the North had been defeated by Taylor's forces on the 8th and 9th of May, and by June 16 he was back in New Orleans with a new plan. He would write a history of the activities of the American forces leading to the defeat of the Mexican Army on the Rio Grande and to the capture of Matamoros. For his work he had collected a bundle of sketches, notes, and other materials.

He wrote Carey and Hart at once, and then, apparently without waiting for a reply, wrote again from New Orleans on June 16, sending six more drawings to add to the six he had already sent. He urged that the sketches of the battlefields be quickly engraved, adding that if the publishers were not interested in using them, he would appreciate their arranging to have them copied anyway, apparently willing himself to sell them.

A few days later, June 25, Thorpe again wrote Carey and Hart, enclosing four more drawings and informing them that he was forwarding about fifty printed pages of manuscript, no doubt set by his compositor. Of the success of the book he had the greatest confidence: "I believe I shall give you one of the most readable books of the season, containing more stirring incidents, serious and comic, together with the war's particulars than is often in a volume. I have been over the whole ground of the battle, conversed with [several ?] officers, kept a voluminous journal etc. which can be condensed into 250 pages. . . . I shall have the only *descriptions of the battles* and subsequent scenes ever published." ¹³

Thorpe wrote again from New Orleans in July, sending eight more chapters and promising an additional six within a week. He had gone to a great deal of expense, he said,

¹³ Originals of these letters of June 16 and June 25 are in the library of the New York Historical Society.

to get his facts and to buy "Spanish" documents for the work. Feeling the work would be valuable as history, timely and interesting for its narrative, he again urged speed in getting the book out and care with its design and printing. Then, with his typical courtesy, he apologized for repeating his requests, explaining "in my anxiety to have everything as it should be I trespass on your good nature."¹⁴

Late in June and early in July Porter had announced in the *Spirit* that both Thorpe and Kendall of the *Picayune* were at the front, and he thanked Thorpe for the envelope of an official dispatch from the Mexican Minister of War to the Prefect of Matamoros. September 5 Porter announced that Thorpe's new book, *Our Army on the Rio Grande*, as it was titled, was nearly ready. Six weeks later he reviewed it, observing that any reader would be rewarded, not only by its stirring and graphic descriptions, but also by new matters of fact. Thorpe's friend, Lewis Gaylord Clark of the *Knickerbocker*, noted the work in his November issue, where he good-humoredly corrected Thorpe's diction and recommended the book to his readers: "'TOM OWEN, the Bee-Hunter,' has done his best in this work, and *his* best is good enough reading for anybody." Both notices were what the 1840's called "puffs" rather than reviews: friends of authors were always expected to supply a new book with "puffs."

As it was finally issued in October, 1846, *Our Army on the Rio Grande* made a volume of 196 closely printed pages, very fully illustrated with drawings. The book detailed the action of the American Army of Occupation from the time of its removal from Corpus Christi to the surrender of the Mexican city of Matamoros, a seaport opposite Brownsville, Texas. Thorpe had made use of eyewitness accounts of the battles, reports of the little camp newspapers, and numerous official documents, both Mexican

¹⁴ Original in the library of the New York Historical Society.

and American. Thorpe had been given access to the reports of the officers in the field by the kindness of Major General Gaines, United States army officer in charge of the area, and by General William Jenkins Worth, both of whom he thanked in his preface.

The writing itself shows the signs of haste in composition, both in language and structure, but the narrative generally moves easily and is lively and colorful.

Thoreau, Lowell, Emerson, and many other New Englanders wrote and spoke against the Mexican War as a scandalous violation of morality and an obvious effort on the part of the Slave States to extend their political power. The judgment is as correct, perhaps, as political generalizations of the sort can be. But the average citizen's acts were far from any calculated venture in national politics. Mexico's ability to make war was still largely an unknown factor. The citizens of Louisiana particularly, because of the closeness of the events, enjoyed a thrill of danger without feeling any very real threat. The excitement of raising local volunteers to protect the country against the Mexicans had stirred the people, and Thorpe shared the common attitude that the war was a stirring and adventurous affair.

His description of the opening of the battle of Palo Alto is of a "scene singularly thrilling and sublime." His interpretation of the feelings of the soldiers is rather painfully conventional: the six thousand Mexicans standing in battle array had "breasts heaving with pent-up emotions and fierce passions, soon to be called forth in deadly strife." Opposing, he set for his readers "the gallant little American army . . . with eyes flashing with enthusiasm, and a proud consciousness of coming victory." These descriptions lack any real observation. Thorpe merely employed the journalistic clichés of the time to call forth his readers' stock responses.

Unlike his writing about the frontier, Thorpe's vision of

the battles and the war itself was in no way speculative: he showed no interest in its significance or the values involved. The engagement was "thrilling," "sublime," undertaken with "deafening cheers" by the American soldiers—in all, thoroughly romantic. His book was a hurried attempt to supply a popular account of stirring events.

Our Army on the Rio Grande reveals several other of Thorpe's ideas, helpful in filling out the pattern of his thought. For the most part, the judgments are intellectual clichés or emotional commonplaces. To the Mexicans he granted bravery if it added to the glory of American arms; otherwise he gave them credit for little more than perfidy and cowardice. Mexico had by this time abolished slavery, and what he could observe of their treatment of Negroes he put down to trickery or the inability to draw proper social distinctions. In noting some American desertions, he also commented on runaway slaves:

About the time of these desertions, several officers lost their servants. They had been enticed away by the inhabitants of Matamoros, and, *for effect*, treated with marked consideration. They sat at table with Mexican families, and were otherwise elevated to a high social position. These servants, in every instance, returned by stealth to their masters, save one or two who had been taken into "the interior."

Thorpe's interpretation of the reason for the Mexicans' dining with the deserting servants may have been correct, but it was part of a pattern of granting them no morality—simply devious expediency.

The Mexicans' failure to make social distinctions on the basis of color also troubled Thorpe. Viewing the enemy wounded and dead after the battles of the 8th and 9th of May, he asked:

Were these indeed the brave soldiers of the 8th and 9th, who had about them their ghastly titles that showed they had been in the thickest of the fight? Were these men Mexicans? Were such

varieties of colors all equal in social condition? Even so. The Castilian with auburn hair, the swarthy Indian with straight, and the dark negro with kinked, with all their intermediate mixtures, lay side by side, all Mexicans, all of the same sympathies, feelings, language. All moved in their winding sheets, evidently equal in mind and body. To the American, who makes distinction in colors, this strange mixture of races *in one people*, causes great surprise.

Thorpe's general good sense saved him from any grotesque absurdity of opinion. He merely observes, with mild provinciality, the fact of a nation's having mixed races yet common sympathies. That Negroes might fight bravely enough to die for their country he found surprising. Thorpe did not speculate about the suppositions underlying the surprise.

His patriotic conventionality expressed itself in several superficial judgments: he found the Mexican in his dress a particularly silly fellow. Thorpe's point of view was that an observer could see at a glance that the Mexican, who fancied himself a gentleman, did not wear the breeches of civilization. Yet, in spite of this fact, Mexican lancers and officers were astonishingly full of pride and self-esteem.¹⁵

The concept of Manifest Destiny in 1846 shaped the popular vision of the future of the United States. This idea, too, stimulated Thorpe's imagination. The inferiority of the dark-skinned people, he felt, offered the superior Anglo-Saxon (a favorite, if rather quaint term) the opportunity to bestow many blessings on Mexico: "Let the northern part of Mexico be once possessed of good laws and an intelligent population . . . and Matamoros would soon grow into a city of great commercial importance. It is not possible for the present inhabitants to accomplish anything." The quickest blessing that came to mind for Thorpe was the blessing of commercial importance, a Phoenician blessing for Matamoros.

¹⁵ Thomas B. Thorpe, *Our Army on the Rio Grande* (Philadelphia, 1846), 134.

Manifest Destiny also had a curious moral or religious quality (the terms are inexact) for Thorpe as for others who believed in it. Among the anecdotes and incidents at the end of his book, Thorpe included the tale of a fighting clergyman, the Reverend Captain R. A. Stuart, sugar planter and Methodist clergyman of Iberville, Louisiana, who commanded a body of volunteers. The date of June 1, 1846, Thorpe predicted, would be a memorable one because on that day the Reverend Captain Stuart preached a significant sermon to the veterans on the battlefield:

The Rev. captain took for his text: *If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt, Then I will cause you to dwell together in this place in the land I gave to your fathers for ever and ever.* Jer. vii., 6, 7.

The comments and illustrations were apposite in the extreme, and suggested by the scenes around the speaker. He dwelt upon the incidents of the preceding month, and of the beautiful spectacle shown to the world by a conquering army, extending over a country its laws,—which were more benign, more liberal, more protecting, than those displaced by the fortunes of war. . . . The soldier-preacher then passed on to the second part of his text,—“*Then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land I gave your fathers for ever and ever.*” It would be impossible for us to give the slightest idea of the conclusion of this remarkable discourse. The Rev. speaker showed most plainly and beautifully, that it was the order of Providence that the Anglo-Saxon race was not only to take possession of the whole North American continent, but to influence and modify the character of the world. . . . He stated that the American people were children of destiny, and were the passive instruments in the hands of an overruling power, to carry out its great designs.

While Thorpe's vision of the future for the United States may seem barbarically simple, the dream was obviously for him exhilarating beyond his power to express. The master race would conquer in the name of the Lord, but it would not be harsh to widows and orphans. It would bless its conquests with more benign laws (one recalls Mexico had already abolished slavery); it would rule justly—the defini-

tion of justice, of course, to be the prerogative of superiority. In the end, the idea became almost mystical for Thorpe, envisioning the American people as "children of destiny . . . passive instruments in the hands of an overruling power, to carry out its great designs." Unlovely as some of its aspects might have been, the concept of Manifest Destiny was bound to appeal to Thorpe as a rationale for the opening of the West, always a powerful symbol for him.

4

Meanwhile, Thorpe's hopes for establishing himself through his investment in the *Tropic* were disappointed. About August 25 the paper ceased publication, and when it resumed on September 17, a brief announcement explained that the copartnership existing under the title of Sawyer, Hall, and Thorpe was dissolved September 16. Another announcement added that F. Sawyer and Charles E. Hall would thereafter conduct the paper as editors and proprietors.

On September 15 Thorpe had written Carey and Hart, stating that he was in financial difficulty and asking them to forward to him a draft of \$112 as an advance payment on the forthcoming *Our Army on the Rio Grande*. He explained that he had been forced to borrow money on the name of a friend and that the note was due. His investment in the *Tropic*, which he had decided on only after considering leaving the South altogether, had been a disastrous loss: "I have failed entirely in my speculation with the *Tropic* through the miserable business management of the conductor of the business department. I shall suffer very great pecuniary loss beside temporary embarrassment."¹⁶ It would appear that Thorpe had invested in the paper not only income from the *Mysteries of the Backwoods* but also whatever he could borrow. In return, he was foreign

¹⁶ Original in the library of the New York Historical Society.

correspondent and part owner for about four and one-half months.

His letter continued, a little less hopefully and exuberantly, that he would forward the California manuscript in sixty days and was still at work on the history of the advance of the American army toward Monterey. In a diminished tone, he asked how far it would be profitable to add to what he had already sent, "if more than one edition is demanded."

The National Reputation

DURING THE MID-FORTIES THORPE'S WRITING CONTINUED to appear in collections and anthologies, bringing him to an ever larger audience. In mid-December, 1846, Carey and Hart published another anthology edited by William Trotter Porter. *A Quarter Race in Kentucky* was broader in its scope than the earlier *Big Bear of Arkansas*, which had illustrated character and incident in the South and Southwest. Porter intended his second humorous collection to illustrate scenes, characters, and incidents throughout "the Universal Yankee Nation." Again, however, the Southwestern writers bulked large in quantity and offered in quality some of the most excellent humor, realism, and frontier characters to be found in the volume. Porter included sketches by Johnson Jones Hooper; George Washington Harris, brilliant manipulator of folk language; Robert Patterson, Thorpe's associate on the *Intelligencer*; George Wilkins Kendall of the *Picayune*; Sol Smith; Joseph M. Field; Henry Clay Lewis, who used the pseudonym "Madison Tensas"; and others.

Thorpe's second finest frontier story, "Bob Herring, the Arkansas Bear Hunter," was included, prefaced by a short

biography recalling the "Big Bear" sketch and praising Thorpe's volume on the Mexican War—unfortunately mistitled. Thus Porter was doing his best to advertise Thorpe's second book.

Porter also edited another book, published in December, a revised and expanded American edition of Peter Hawker's *Instructions to Young Sportsmen*. Colonel Peter Hawker had first issued his *Instructions to Young Sportsmen, with Directions for the Choice, Care, and Management of Guns, Hints for the Preservation of Game; and Instructions for Shooting Wildfowl*, in London in 1814. The book had been a popular hunter's handbook, and Porter's revision, the first in America, was the ninth edition of the work. The American supplement which Porter added contained contributions from J. J. Audubon, Henry William Herbert, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, T. B. Thorpe, and other writers on hunting and the outdoor life. Thorpe was represented by his sketch on Southern night shooting titled "Woodcock Fire Hunting."

But far more important in bringing Thorpe to the attention of the standard literary audience of the time was Griswold's *Prose Writers of America* which appeared in mid-1847. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, through his *The Poets and Poetry of America* (1842), the prefaces to his various editions of English and American writers, and his editorship of *Graham's*, was perhaps the foremost leader and former of American literary taste in the 1840's and 1850's. Although Griswold had his share of obvious deficiencies as a critic—he was neither profound nor objective—he was widely read and had an independent grasp of the broad pattern of the literary culture of his time.¹ His assessment of Thorpe is important because it defines, to a degree, Thorpe's public literary position.

Griswold states his general purpose and critical point of view in his preface: "This volume contains a brief survey

¹ Joy Bayless, *Rufus Wilmot Griswold* (Nashville, 1943), 117.

of our intellectual history. . . . I have not attempted to describe the merely successful writers, but such as have evinced unusual powers in controlling the national mind, or in forming or illustrating the national character." Griswold, like Thorpe and countless others, shared the interest in the American character, something not yet defined but new and of good portent for the world. American writers, Griswold felt, were beginning to control that national mind, both forming and illustrating it.

In introducing the selections of Thorpe's writings, Griswold observed that the nation had the promise of a rich and peculiar literature in the South and Southwest in the work of Morgan Neville, in the writers in Porter's two anthologies, in the work of Johnson Jones Hooper and others. All these sketches, he noted justly enough, "contain passages of bold, original and indigenous, though sometimes not very delicate humour." He had hoped to include work of Judge Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, William P. Hawes and others, but as space forbade it, "Mr. Thorpe may serve as a type of the class of writers that has been referred to." Griswold included a biography of Thorpe and ended his introduction with a critical evaluation of Thorpe's work:

He has a genuine relish for the sports and pastimes of southern frontier life, and describes them with remarkable freshness and skill of light and shade. No one enters more heartily into all the whims and grotesque humours of the backwoodsman, or brings him more actually and clearly before us. He has fixed upon his pages one of the evanescent phases of American life, with a distinctness and fidelity that will make his books equally interesting as works of art or history.

Griswold observed accurately enough Thorpe's interest in frontier life, but he did not perceive, apparently, how unusual Thorpe's achievement in the presentation of Southwestern frontier character had been. The observation that Thorpe entered "heartily into all the whims and grotesque humours of the backwoodsman" is a bit of embroidery to

assure readers of Thorpe's qualification as frontier reporter. Thorpe was no frontiersman, and his observation had been on Mississippi River steamboats, on hunting trips, and in the small upcountry Louisiana towns. Griswold's seeing the backwoodsman as a "grotesque" is perhaps just enough: to a measure Thorpe, as a close reader of Irving and Dickens, so saw the American settlers of the border regions.

The manuscript from which Griswold drew his biographical data, probably written by Thorpe himself, is preserved at the Boston Public Library. It pictures Thorpe (that is, Thorpe presents himself as he would have the public see him, presumably) as the romantic Rambler and quiet speculator on the unusual, the faraway, the vast Western country which was to be the "groundwork of a literature heretofore unknown in the United States."

Griswold printed five selections from Thorpe's published work. "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" was reprinted from *Mysteries of the Backwoods*. Four other pieces entitled "Fat Game," "Dogs and Guns," "A Farm in Arkansas," and "Death of the Big Bear" followed, each a sketch lifted from the one tale, "The Big Bear of Arkansas." These vignettes could stand alone, although the most valuable and distinctive part of the sketch, the character of the Big Bear, was wholly lost—again evidence that Griswold missed one important value of Thorpe's contribution. Missing the point of the tale—the creation of a loquacious Western character—Griswold felt free to revise Thorpe's episodic structure.

However limited Griswold may have been as an editor, he did perceive something of Thorpe's ability, and he did introduce him to a wider and more general audience than had heretofore known him. And though Griswold's treatment of "The Big Bear of Arkansas" did not show much discernment of its complexity and its purpose, he did have enough literary judgment to select it as Thorpe's best

piece. Had the matter been left to Thorpe himself, he would probably have offered one of his nature essays.

In England, too, Thorpe was shortly to appear in two popular collections of American writing. As early as 1842 his "The American Wild Cat" had been written for the London *New Sporting Magazine*, and others of his tales were reprinted in English journals. "The Big Bear of Arkansas" was reprinted in the London *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1850. Then in 1852 appeared *Traits of American Humor*, edited by Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Nova Scotian Supreme Court judge and himself creator of the fictional Yankee peddler, Sam Slick. Haliburton had observed the American language with some interest, holding that the people of the North, South, East, and West differed in their speech as well as in their habits. The frankness of language of some of the tales he had found improper for a genteel audience, and consequently some expressions he had "deemed it proper to expunge." The three-volume collection included Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas," with the author's name, an unusual honor, as most of the work was printed anonymously.

Two years later, 1854, Haliburton edited another three-volume collection, also printed in London. This, *The Americans at Home*, was designed as a companion to the popular earlier anthology. In part from his own observations, but largely from his literary materials, Haliburton defined for his English readers the type of character the American frontier was producing:

In the country, and especially that portion situated on the confines of the forest, man, on the contrary, is under no such restraint. He is almost beyond the reach of the law, and altogether exempt from the control, or utterly ignorant or regardless of those observances, which public opinion demands and enforces. The only society he knows or acknowledges is that of his own family. He enacts the laws that are to regulate his household. He governs but owns no obedience. His neighbors, if those can be

so called who live several miles from him, aid him in those emergencies for which his individual strength is insufficient, or sustain him in those trials that require the sympathy and kindness of his fellow-creatures, while they occasionally unite with him in hunting, fishing, drinking or carousing.

These pioneers do not, as might be supposed, so much present samples of a class, as a collection of isolated independent individuals, whose characters are distinguished alike for being both strongly developed and yet widely dissimilar. Nevertheless there are many peculiarities that pervade the entire population. They all have the virtues and vices inseparable from unrestrained liberty. They are bold, hardy, manly, hospitable, generous, and kindhearted; while, at the same time, they are violent and vindictive in temper, reckless, improvident, often intemperate, and almost always without local attachment. . . .

The outskirts of civilization wherein they dwell, and the newly settled territories of which they are in advance, present a wide field for the picturesque delineation of men and character, and the Americans have availed themselves of it with more skill, freedom, accuracy, and humour, than any strangers who have attempted it.

Haliburton, too, accepted the idea that the American frontier was producing a new character, and he had a lively appreciation of what an unusual group of writers was doing to record and preserve the type. For his second collection, he included Thorpe's "Bob Herring, the Arkansas Bear Hunter," without this time giving the author's name.

Thorpe's next important appearance in an anthology was again in America in 1855, when George and Evert Duyckinck's two-volume, ten-pound *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* appeared. Evert Duyckinck was a far different editor from Griswold. Well-educated, broadly traveled, and widely read, he brought to his task not only an ambitious plan but a discrimination of taste that makes his collection a standard reference work. Of Thorpe's work, he reprinted "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." In an introductory biographical and critical sketch, he said of Thorpe's collection, *The Hive of the Bee-Hunter* (1854): "This miscellany of sketches of peculiar American character, scenery, and rural

sports, is marked by the simplicity and delicacy with which its rough humours are handled. The style is easy and natural, the sentiment fresh and unforced, showing a fine sensibility." Duyckinck perceived that an admirable simplicity was characteristic of Thorpe's best work. Further, it was apparent to him that Thorpe's work showed more literary craftsmanship and did not include the brutality of treatment obvious in the work of George Washington Harris, Henry Clay Lewis, and A. B. Longstreet particularly.

Thorpe's inclusion in the two most important American anthologies of his time² is the measure of his literary stature at mid-century. He was evaluated, justly enough, as a minor but highly gifted writer in one of America's most unusual genres. With his pleasant humor and his interest in the American West, he was giving literary expression to one of the central national visions.

² For an account of the Griswold and Duyckinck anthologies and the personalities and the political, social, and literary milieu out of which they grew, see Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*.

The Conservator and the Daily National

AFTER THORPE'S PAINFUL LOSSES WITH THE NEW ORLEANS *Daily Tropic* in the fall of 1846, he left the city and moved his family up the Mississippi to Baton Rouge. Here, on its low bluffs overlooking the wide river was a town much smaller, much less exotic, than New Orleans, but of growing importance, soon to be the capital of the state. Thorpe had promise of a place editing one of the town's weekly newspapers, a task less trying than the work with the daily *Tropic*. As editor of a weekly journal he hoped to have more time to devote to his writing.

By October 1, 1846, he was settled. But moving his family had been expensive, and he wrote his publisher saying that he had had to borrow \$250 from a friend. As security he had given an order on Carey and Hart for the first money due from the Mexican War volume. Of his hopes for writing, he was trying to place himself in a position where "I make Literature *a part of my business*."

In addition to his continuation of the history of the

Mexican War, he was planning other projects: "I am now at work on two books which I will soon send in. I allude to my *California* and a volume of your *Library of* [word illegible] *humorous American works* both of which so far as matter is concerned are already completed."¹ The optative mood returns to Thorpe's letters, along with determination to continue his writing.

He concluded his letter by asking that Carey and Hart send him some old books of travels. Descriptions of the far away would give him material for his writing. The Western medicine of movement had begun to refresh his spirit.

Finally he decided not to attach himself to any paper as an employee. Meditating on the possible growth of Baton Rouge as the future capital of Louisiana, he determined to establish his own paper. Later in October, then, he sailed back down the Mississippi to New Orleans and set about buying the necessary equipment for a printing office. Confidence restored and following, dream smitten, the vision of financial success, he wrote Carey and Hart, "I am happy to say I have every prospect of doing an excellent business and of course recovering from the losses I sustained in the city."²

While in New Orleans he had managed to get a copy of *Our Army on the Rio Grande*, seeing for the first time the published volume. He was pleased with the appearance of the slender little book. His friends, he added, urged him to continue with his history of the war, and he was busy collecting material and getting his acquaintances in the army to help him with the task.

Successful in his buying trip, Thorpe had his printing equipment loaded on a steamboat at the New Orleans docks and churned back up the river. One imagines him chatting in the main salon or walking on the passenger deck to look at the forests or the great river, short, portly, his hands be-

¹ Original in the library of the New York Historical Society.

² *Ibid.*

hind him, gloomy in appearance, and filled with incorrigible hope.

On November 7, the *Baton Rouge Gazette*, friendly competitor and Whig ally, printed a notice of Thorpe's plans for a new journal in the town:

Mr. Thorpe.—This gentleman, well known as the author of *Tom Owen the Bee Hunter*, *Our Army on the Rio Grande*, and *Mysteries of the Backwoods*, we understand is about to establish a semi-weekly paper in this town. He is a gentleman of superior talents, and will no doubt aid in promoting the general interests and welfare of our community, among which he intends to reside. We tender him our sincere wishes for his success in his new undertaking.

The *Conservator*, as Thorpe's newest journal was called, seems to have perished without leaving any extant copies. Its contents and progress can be only approximately reconstructed through references to it in other sources. Griswold, in his *Prose Writers of America*, wrote that it had been established in November, 1846. By mid-December the *Gazette* was quoting from the *Conservator*.

The January 23, 1847, issue of the *Gazette* included a quotation from the *Conservator* saying that the mechanics of the town were being used by demagogues to get votes for petty municipal offices. Certainly Thorpe was no Jacobin. Following the quotation, the *Gazette* printed a reply, a letter signed "A Mechanic." The *Gazette* itself printed no blast at Thorpe, thus keeping the rivalry gentlemanly, most unusual for the uncorseted journalism of the time.

The "Mechanic" wrote that Thorpe was opposed to the interests of good mechanics (carpenters, tailors, cabinet makers, and the like) and threatened that if he were ever to run for any public office their opposition would defeat him. Thorpe may well have distrusted the ability of working people to think for themselves. Furthermore, the honest mechanics were members of the Democratic party more

often than not, which helped to simplify for Thorpe the problem of evaluating their intelligence.

Thorpe continued his active interest in local cultural and literary affairs in Baton Rouge. Early in January he was appointed to serve on the Fine Arts Committee of the annual fair of the Louisiana Agricultural and Mechanics Association. In February he helped to found the Baton Rouge Lyceum, meeting with other citizens of the town at the reading room of T. B. R. Hatch for the purpose of organizing "an Institution for the dissemination of useful knowledge." Thorpe and the Reverend William M. Crenshaw addressed the company on "the utility and beneficial results of the organization of the Society." Thorpe was elected a member of the executive committee, which at once planned a series of lectures and later established a small library.

Throughout the winter and into the spring of 1847 Thorpe continued to write Carey and Hart to inform them of the progress of his second volume on the war. He was pleased with Felix O. C. Darley's illustrations for his work. Soon Hart wrote that the volume already published was moving slowly. Thorpe replied,³ expressing his disappointment, but adding that he was sure the second would do much better, as it would "be of a much happier character than the first." Further, he was following the progress of the war in other areas and could write *Our Army and Navy at Vera Cruz*. On January 6, 1847, Thorpe wrote that he expected General Zachary Taylor would be the next presidential candidate, a circumstance which should stimulate a demand for the best history of the campaigns.

Among his writings for his own paper, Thorpe did at least one hunting sketch, entitled "The Chase," reprinted by Porter in the January 9 *Spirit* as from the *Louisiana Con-*

³ *Ibid.* The preceding letter, dated New Orleans, November 27, 1846, is in the Griswold Collection, Boston Public Library.

servator, which may well have been the full title of Thorpe's Baton Rouge newspaper. The essay is a hunting sketch and not a humorous tale. It deals with the planter class rather than frontiersmen or backwoods characters.

Finally, later in January, Porter got around to reviewing the *Mysteries of the Backwoods*. "Who has not read 'Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter'? and who that has but will seize with avidity upon the present work from the same brilliant pen. . . .," he asked, but the book, out for over a year, continued to move slowly. Porter kept trying, however, for his first neglect had been mere carelessness. The next week he reprinted "The Mississippi" as "From Thorpe's 'Mysteries of the Backwoods' just published by Carey and Hart," a kindly falsehood.

Thorpe apparently sent copies of his paper to the *Spirit's* exchange desk, for during the spring of 1847 Porter seemed to be quite well informed about Thorpe's activities and eager to mention him often. He noted in April that Thorpe was delivering a course of lectures in New Orleans, an activity Thorpe was to continue at various times throughout his career.⁴ In May Porter reprinted from the *Conservator* an account of the Baton Rouge races at the local Magnolia course.

2

But the *Conservator* also failed to provide Thorpe the financial status he desired. By June, 1847, he had left Baton Rouge and returned to New Orleans to establish another paper—the *Daily National*. A consecutive series of issues of the journal from September 10 to December 30 is preserved in the library of the Louisiana State Museum, and from these it is possible to examine in some detail Thorpe's activities as editor of a city daily during the 1840's.

The September 10 issue is numbered 83, indicating the

⁴ *Spirit*, XVII (April 24, 1847), 102.

journal was established in mid-June. The *Daily National* was, the editorial column head proclaimed, "Published every morning, Sunday excepted at No. 44 St. Charles St., opposite the St. Charles Exchange. Thomas B. Thorpe, Editor."

In format it was a four-page sheet of seven columns, slightly smaller than the *Tropic* and the *Picayune*. The first, third, and fourth pages were devoted to closely crowded railroad timetables, steamboat sailing dates, notices, and advertisements, as was the custom of the time.

The news and editorials were printed on the second page, inside. Immediately under the title at the head of the first column, Thorpe proclaimed the political affiliation of his new paper in bold-face type: "For President of the U. S./ Zachary Taylor." The leading news stories for the September 10 issue were George Wilkins Kendall's dispatches from Tacubaya, Mexico, dated August 27, 28, and 29, reporting the progress of the war. Another item showed the timeless journalistic interest in crime stories in a notice headed, "Horrible Murder of a Young Woman," which opened, "A very melancholy affair, says the N. Y. *Sun*, occurred at Mt. Pleasant, near Sing Sing on the 29th inst." The items of local news concerned events of personalities the editor knew at first hand or had copied from other city papers, suggesting Thorpe may have had little or no assistance from reporters. The daily court reports filled part of a column, another standard practice of the day. In appearance and in content it was an ordinary but literate city daily except that it included rather more news of artistic and literary affairs than did its fellows.

Throughout the latter half of 1847 the paper was wholly dedicated to General Taylor's candidacy and quite active in his support. In the issue for September 11 Thorpe noted that the general's popularity seemed to be waning. He blamed the fancied decline on opponents who were trying to undermine the "old hero's" popularity by provoking him to write

letters on such "inflammable" issues as the National Bank, the Wilmot Proviso, and so forth. It must be inferred from this that Thorpe felt his candidate would be stronger if he took no stand on controversial questions. And, as a matter of practical politics, Taylor's lack of public commitment on issues was a point of strength for the old general. Henry Clay, the logical standard-bearer of the party if the voters desired statements of principles, had been at all times a national Whig, standing for internal improvements, balance of interests, and for the settlement of disputes by compromise. Clay, more than any other individual, had given form and direction to the party. Taylor, however, was unburdened by any passionate political interests and had very few beliefs. He had finally offered himself on something of a non-partisan basis, as generals are wont to do. His war-time leadership had made him popular throughout the country. Moreover, as a Southerner and slaveholder he was particularly acceptable to the South, and would be, it was supposed, a solid champion of the interests of his section.

With Clay as the leader of the Whigs and Taylor as the candidate of greater popular appeal, the approaching convention presented a delicate problem. In his issue for September 14 Thorpe noted that the Young Whigs of New York had nominated Mr. Clay. They were, he wrote, not friends of Mr. Clay but enemies of the Whig party, and he noted with sorrow that the Whigs were not politicians, that is, did not conduct party strategy realistically. The next day he wrote with satisfaction that Whig papers all over the country were opposing Clay's nomination. Of himself he said, referring to his past support of Clay, "We have fought, bled and died for Mr. Clay," adding that he opposed Clay's nomination, not out of any opposition to the man, but because Clay could never get a majority of the votes. Thorpe continued that he was not a political martyr who would rather be defeated with the good Mr. Clay than victorious under another. Thorpe, who had his moments as moralist,

visionary, and idealist, fobbed himself off as a political realist with perfect innocence.

As for the issues of the day, he supported the position of the South on slavery simply on the basis that the constitution accepted it and it was, therefore, not to be tampered with. George Mifflin Dallas and James Buchanan, he wrote, were anti-Southern. "Mr. Dallas knows that a majority of the states have already declared in favor of the Wilmot Proviso and that in any *change in the Constitution the South alone* would suffer."⁵ A few days later he noted that the issue of Negro suffrage was before the voters of Connecticut. He added ironically that the philanthropy of abolitionists was usually for distant Negroes. Other than these few references, however, his paper contained no discussion of the problem and no defense of slavery. His moral view of the issue was to be expressed later.

Among the local problems which interested him was that of the health of New Orleans. In this he was a reformer. During the yellow fever epidemic he wrote in mid-September a passionate editorial in favor of some kind of sanitary regulations for New Orleans. He noted the historical opposition in the city to quarantine but pointed out that no other city of its size in the country was without laws regulating hygiene. The stacks of decaying cattle hides on the levee, he thought, might contribute to the general unhealthiness. He blasted the sale of condemned army provisions by grasping merchants. This unwholesome practice might help army contractors or even the United States Treasury, but no recompense in money balanced the scales in the loss of human life. Again, in his October 12 issue, he complained of the filth in the New Orleans streets, saying it was a matter of universal remark.

Within fewer than twenty years the strange convolutions of the Civil War were to give him the responsibility of keeping the city clean.

⁵ New Orleans *Daily National*, October 4, 1847.

On October 22 no advertisements appeared on the front page of his paper. Instead the columns were filled with names, headed "Deaths by Yellow Fever During the Great Epidemic of 1847." Because of popular demand, he said, he republished the list in the next issue. He was dramatizing a monstrous situation, hoping to move that painful human resistance which is always opposed to change, even if motivated by morality or good sense.

Another of Thorpe's concerns was elementary education. Enabling legislation for general public education had only been passed a few years earlier in Louisiana, and the system was just beginning to grow. The *Daily National* for September 15 included an article on the *Boston Common School Journal*, edited by the great Horace Mann. This periodical, Thorpe wrote, should be of interest to every friend of education, and now that Louisiana had introduced its own common school system, all directors and teachers should be acquainted with the *Journal*. Horace Mann, Thorpe said, was among the "ablest and most useful writers we have on education"—a just evaluation. Thorpe did good work in trying to educate the public in the cause of public schools.

Other items in the *Daily National* opposed dueling and lynching, both more common in the backwoods and frontier regions than they were in more civilized parts of the country. In general, the social policies of Thorpe's papers seem both wise and temperate. He was a kindly man and a man of good will, if not always of moral passion or prophetic vision. His position was frequently that of the reformer, but usually that of the gradualist reformer, opposed to violence even if he did breathe fire against the Mexicans.

As always in his newspapers, Thorpe continued to write about artistic matters. In his September 13 issue he included a long article on the facile Hiram Powers, whose *Greek Slave* was then being exhibited in New York, calling the statue the masterpiece of art of modern times. Thorpe liked the idea of the rugged and untaught American triumphing

over the effete artists of worn-out civilizations, and he wrote that the sculptor, "Mr. Powers, a citizen of the West, uncouth in manner and unacquainted with the details of sculpture, [was] inspired with the most exalted conception of beauty." Again the West appears as symbolic of a formative influence, efficacious in art as in the creation of character and in politics.

The economic problem of the artist, too, was one with which Thorpe could sympathize. He wrote that Powers was poor, had a large family to support, and had to live abroad. For these reasons the owner's liberality in allowing the statue to be exhibited for fees going to the artist was most commendable.

One of the problems that wrung the spirits of American art lovers at mid-century was the question of nudity in sculpture and painting. The public exhibition of Powers' famed work kept the controversy stirring. In one of his issues Thorpe quoted an ingenious solution being offered in the South and commented on it: "The Mobile Herald and Tribune hopes that if Powers' Greek Slave comes to Mobile, that it will be exhibited at stated hours to the gentlemen, and at others to the ladies. The idea is a singular one truly, and it would argue to us a want of knowledge of the effect of great works of art upon the human mind."⁶ Thorpe continued by observing it seemed that nude statues did strike at the foundations of modesty but added that Powers, Phidias, and Angelo (mysterious trinity) clothed their forms in moral beauty. Thorpe was uncomfortable to find himself opposing what passed for morality and modesty and could not quite find the logic to support the good sense of his tastes.

It may well be that Thorpe's slight unconventionality in point of view and his practice of giving some support to unpopular reforms were not altogether an asset to him as newspaper editor. He apparently did not see himself in the

⁶ *Ibid.*, October 7, 1847.

slightest as a man with a mission, but he was hopeful and had an honest impulse to express what seemed to him common sense ideas.

Again in his newspaper Thorpe revealed his curious fascination with the fighting Methodist parson whose sermon on Manifest Destiny he had reproduced in his *Our Army on the Rio Grande*. The *Daily National* for September 27 reprinted the concluding prayer of the Reverend Captain: "Take old Rough and Ready under Thy special charge. Amen. M-A-R-C-H." The prayer for General Taylor was new to Thorpe's report of the episode but not surprising; the prayer now had the political use of adding the mysticism of Manifest Destiny to the coming national elections. The circumstance of a troop-leading minister embodied for Thorpe some of the appeal of the hosts of the Lord smiting their enemies hip and thigh in the name of righteousness.

Once during his editorship of the *Daily National* Thorpe had occasion to mention one of the religious revivals which periodically took place in the South as elsewhere. These were often scorned by the Whig planters as orgies appropriate for poor-whites and ignorant Negroes. Thorpe wrote, "The Mississippi and Alabama papers are filled with accounts of religious revivals. . . . The impression made in the community, and particularly upon the residents of our town, is great, and we believe will be lasting."⁷ Apparently, then, Thorpe approved of the evangelism of the religion of his father and expected the camp meetings to be agents of good in the communities where they occurred.

Only one frontier story by Thorpe appeared in the *National* between September and December, and it was actually a hunting sketch without backwoods characters. Entitled "Enemy in Front and Rear," it is the tale of one Hapgood, who, out hunting, discovered two bear cubs, only to be promptly treed by the furious mother. On examining his position in the tree, he found he had as a companion a huge,

⁷ *Ibid.*, September 29, 1847.

venomous snake. In the end he succeeded in firing at the bear and killing it. Safe again on the ground he discovered that all of his bushy, black hair, of which he was quite vain, had wilted and turned white. The story was told, characteristically, in the framework setting of a group of hunters around a campfire, not by Hapgood, but by a friend of his. During the tale Hapgood had apparently slept, but at the end, as all were expressing amazement that hair could turn white in so brief a time, he roused himself to say that the time he was in the tree had not been short at all, but rather felt like a thousand years.⁸ The sketch is a slight one and was not reprinted by Thorpe in his later book.

The *Daily National* announced in October that it was expanding by adding editorial assistance and buying new type to improve its appearance. Outwardly all seemed well. Thorpe was receiving ever-widening appreciation for his achievement as a writer; his efforts as an editor were bringing him recognition as a minor but increasingly important force in Louisiana state politics; and at its 1847 commencement his university, Wesleyan, awarded him the honorary degree of Master of Arts, a singularly appropriate bestowal. But financially newspaper work was proving unsatisfactory.

In the December 13, 1847, issue of his journal, Thorpe announced, "My connection with The Daily National as its editor ceased on the 10th inst. T. B. Thorpe." Once again, after eleven years in the South, the last five characterized by the most varied and strenuous effort, he had failed to achieve the competency necessary to the state of a gentleman. The *Daily National* venture was his last as editor and publisher in the South.

3

During the months he was editing the *Daily National*, Thorpe continued his historical writing. In June, 1847,

⁸ *Ibid.*, October 6, 1847.

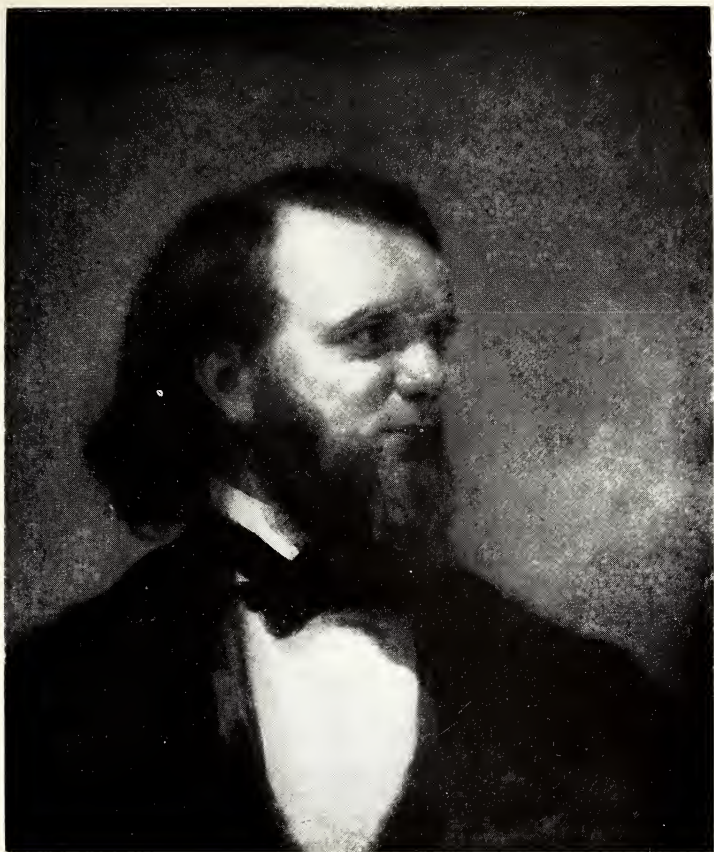
Carey and Hart wrote they had received the complete manuscript of *Our Army at Monterey* [sic]. Thorpe replied that he was continuing his work on a third volume to be called *Our Army at Buena Vista*, adding ambiguously that the two together would make a single book, but the former might be published separately. He felt certain that his work would finally be a complete history of Taylor's northern campaigns.

Our Army at Monterey probably appeared in November, for on December 3 Thorpe wrote his publishers again expressing regret that any remark of his (probably his statement that *Our Army at Monterey* was merely part of a longer book) had delayed publication of the volume. The *Daily National* had demanded all his time and energies, leaving no opportunity for his writing. He hinted that he was through with editorial work: "I would say incidentally that my success in Newspaper publishing has not been commensurate to my anticipations and that I shall in all probability soon be so circumstanced as to devote my whole time to Literary pursuits and I have in the last few years accumulated an immense amount of material."⁹

Thorpe's dream that he could devote all his time to writing takes on the familiarity of an old refrain. The amount of manuscript material he had on hand by this time, even in notes, must have been large. In this letter he mentions another plan: "I have also had for many years an historical novel nearly finished which I think would attract considerable attention as it is original in its design and story." The reference perhaps is to *The Master's House*, which was to appear in 1854. Had it appeared before the close of the 1840's, it would indeed have attracted attention for its originality.

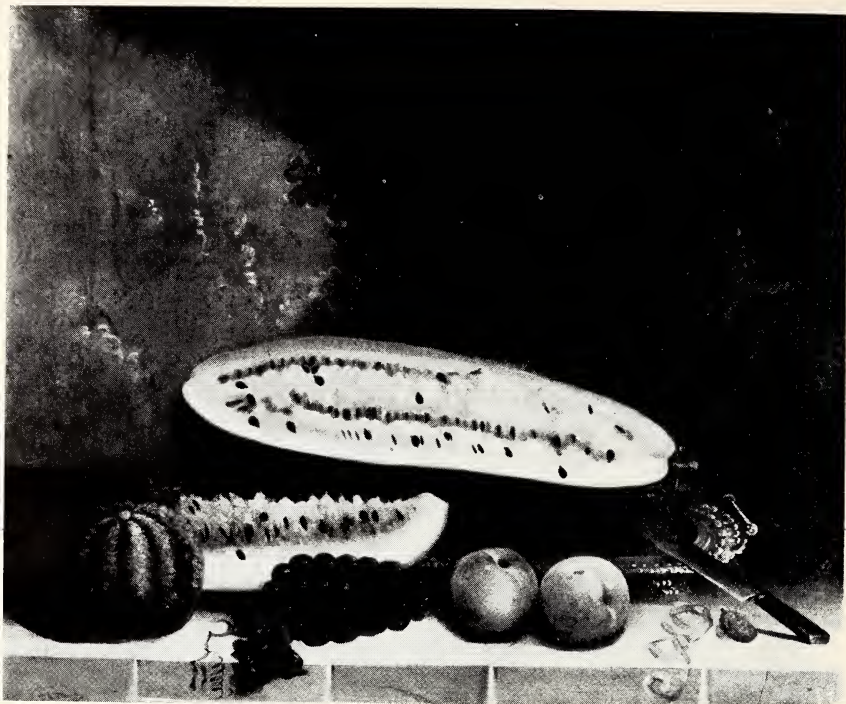
Our Army at Monterey, Thorpe's second book on the Mexican War, was somewhat less elaborate in format than *Our Army on the Rio Grande* but still was a neat companion.

⁹ Original in the library of the New York Historical Society.



Courtesy Mrs. William S. Fulton

THOMAS BANGS THORPE.



Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Ray Samuel

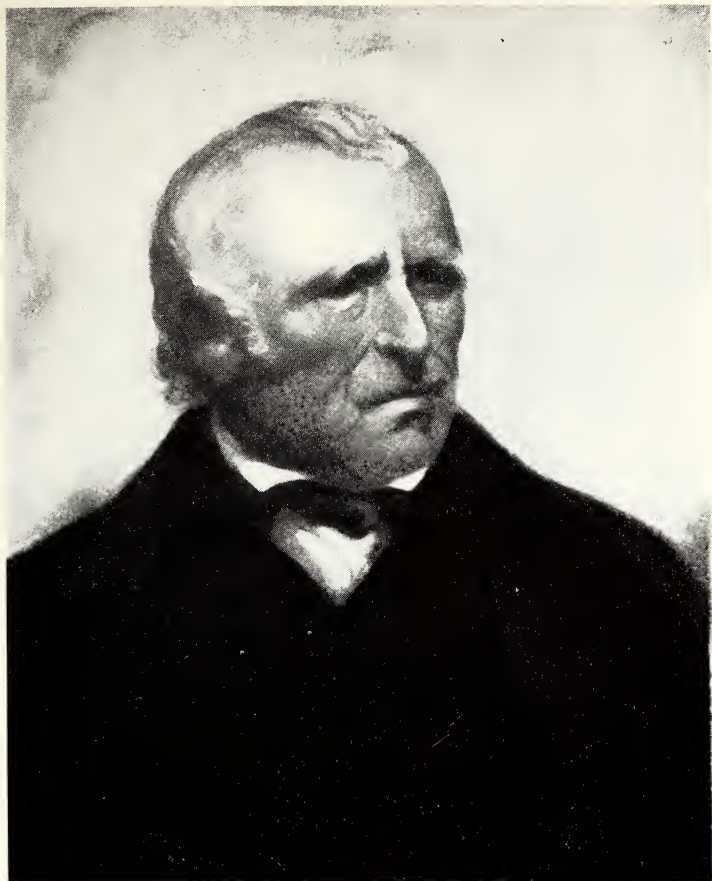
STILL LIFE, painted by Thomas Bangs Thorpe, 1839.



"TOM OWEN, THE BEE-HUNTER," from an illustration by Felix O. C. Darley in the *Mysteries of the Backwoods*.

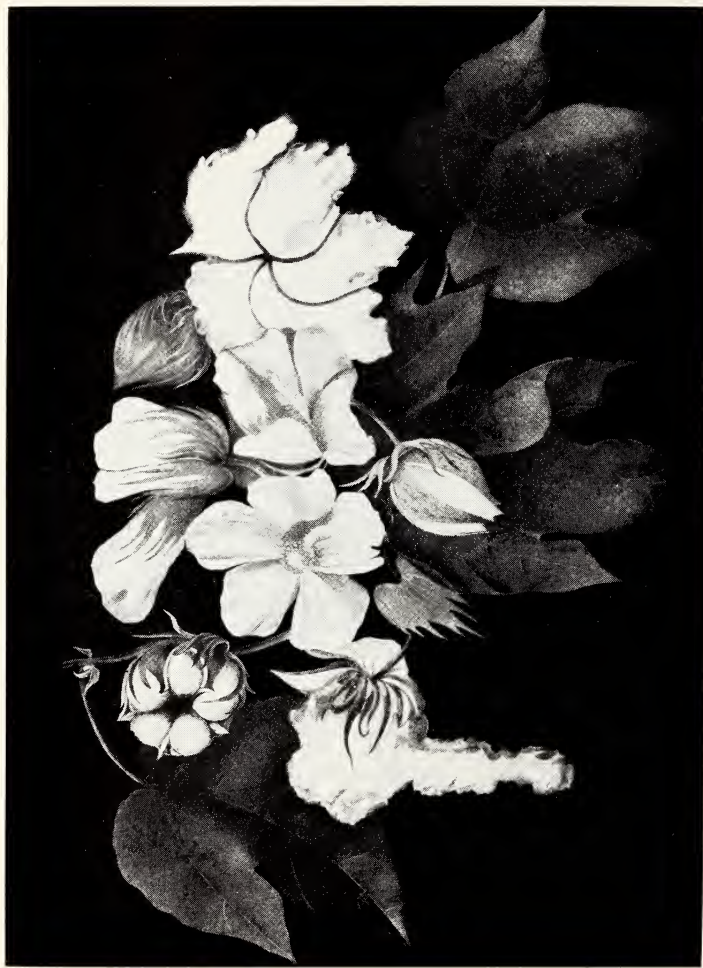


"THE BIG BEAR OF ARKANSAS," an illustration from
The Hive of "The Bee-Hunter."



Courtesy Mrs. William S. Fulton

GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR,
painted by Thomas Bangs Thorpe.



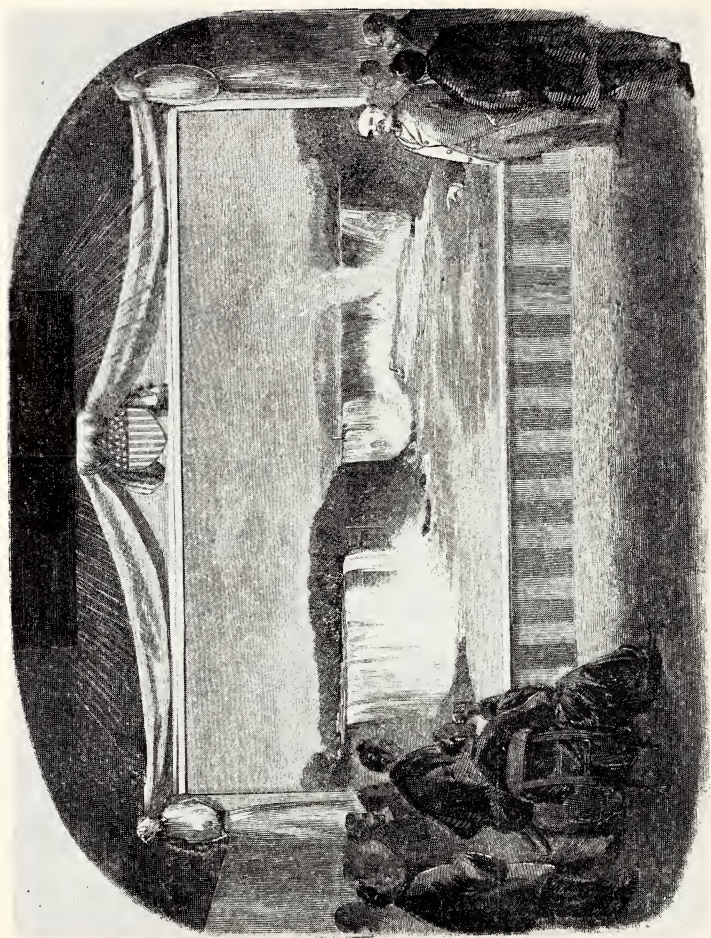
Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Ray Samuel

THE COTTON PLANT, painted by Thomas Bangs Thorpe.



NIAGARA AS IT IS, painted by Thomas Bangs Thorpe.

Courtesy Fose Galleries, Boston



Harper's Weekly

THE JAPANESE AMBASSADORS VIEWING THORPE'S PICTURE OF NIAGARA.

ion volume. Darley had done a single illustration for the title page, but there were only two other illustrations and one map in the book. Also it was a bit shorter, having only 123 pages of text, but it was supplemented by over 20 pages of obituaries of officers who had been killed at Monterrey, numerous official reports, and a final set of statistics of killed and wounded, making in all a volume of 204 pages. Thorpe's scrappy organization was the result not only of haste in composition but also of his plan that this should be but a part of a larger work. The appended statistics are clear evidence that Thorpe had not undertaken with any real care the job of composition. The careless form decreases the value of the content of the little book.

Thorpe's materials and methods were like those of his preceding history. He described in detail the country through which the army passed. He recorded and praised the bravery of the American soldiers which was, indeed, worthy of admiration. He lauded General Taylor for his brilliant strategy, which was less worthy of Thorpe's praise than the valor of the general's soldiers. The ubiquitous Fighting Parson, the Reverend Captain R. A. Stewart of the Andrew Jackson regiment of Louisiana Volunteers, appeared again, for having preached the sermon which was "the first preached by a Protestant clergyman in Mexico, and in the history of the religious movement of that country, will ever be one of interest."¹⁰ Because of the fierceness of the battle at Monterrey, Thorpe generally conceded the Mexican soldiers obstinacy and frequently real valor in the defense of their city against the American troops. However, the mixture of blood in Mexico continued to trouble Thorpe. He wrote that the private soldier in the Mexican army was at best "a degraded being—a strange representation of different races, where the evil qualities of each particular one is alone retained." Such unreflective acceptance

¹⁰ Thomas B. Thorpe, *Our Army at Monterey* (Philadelphia, 1847), 10. The name was spelled *Stuart* in *Our Army at the Rio Grande*.

of the folk anthropology of his day and place dilutes the substance of many of Thorpe's generalizations.

During his earlier visit to Matamoros Thorpe had found the Mexican women attractive, an extension of sympathy frequently observable among a conquering soldiery. His interesting rationalizations, far from ripe, were extended in his second volume:

The Mexican women of every class are brave and humane. They resented the surrender of Matamoros, and denounced the members of their own army to their faces. At Monterey, the women wrote letters to different departments, charging their own troops with cowardice. They have always shown every disposition to make any sacrifices in the defence of their country; and there is an almost certainty that a woman commanded a body of Lancers at Monterey, and was distinguished for her bravery. . . .

In the whole of Mexico, in fact in all the Spanish American countries, the women are superior to the men, both in body and mind. Comparatively uneducated, they perform their social duties with a higher regard to virtue than the moral standard of the nation demands. . . .

The peculiar relation of conqueror and conquered, makes, save in extraordinary cases, a proper appreciation of Mexican society impossible. It seems, however, to be in the order of Providence, that these women, so justly to be admired, are to become wives and mothers of a better race.

Apparently Thorpe was not troubled that his last sentence was inconsistent with his objections to racial mixtures. But the idea of a grand amalgamation of peoples, too, was frequently a part of the shadowy complex labeled *Manifest Destiny*. Walt Whitman, with the nobility of a universal love and hope, had in "A Passage to India" formed in his poetry a mystical vision of the mixture of all races as one of the culminations of the democratic process. Thus Thorpe's vision of a grand amalgamation of peoples, while early, was not unique.

Thorpe's venture into the writing of history had, by the end of 1847, produced two hastily constructed little volumes

which were not successful in his day and have been of limited use to historians since. He had done his work as a journalist, seeking to capitalize on the excitement over the war. His shadowy philosophy of history led him to the creation of heroes. Further, praise of General Zachary Taylor had for him a political use which he exploited. His love for anecdote and his personal contact with Taylor, Major J. H. Eaton and others add color and vigor to the narrative and have some value. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is Thorpe's revelation of the under-facets of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. He was peculiarly sensitive to certain national emotions and desires. In constructing visions of characters and versions of visions he chose materials from the true ungainly lumber of popular imagination. But he lacked clarity, and his insight is carelessly mixed and inconsistent.

Thorpe and General Zachary Taylor

IN THE WEEKS FOLLOWING HIS MID-DECEMBER BREAK WITH the *Daily National*, Thorpe moved again to Baton Rouge. He established his family in a little white cottage on the edge of town and himself in a studio on Lafayette Street, which stretched along the edge of the low bluffs overlooking the Mississippi. Here Thorpe worked on his "immense" pile of manuscripts and painted portraits and Louisiana scenes.

His immediate literary project was the third volume of Taylor's campaigns, centering around the American victory at Buena Vista. Apparently Thorpe was working with more care, for he now had an opportunity to do his research in a manner he found most pleasant, by personal contact with the principals. General Taylor had returned to Baton Rouge in December and was living in the Spanish Cottage on the military reservation just north of town. On March 8 Thorpe wrote his publishers to say that he was seeing Major Eaton, Captain Garnett, and General Taylor every day. Robert S. Garnett and Joseph H. Eaton were both young officers,

trusted members of Taylor's staff. They had been with him throughout the Mexican campaign. The result of his interviews with Taylor and his officers, plus other research, Thorpe felt, would be a volume both unusually interesting and complete. "I flatter myself," he wrote, "it will be in a degree at least worthy of the great battle it records."¹

The history of the Battle of Buena Vista was not Thorpe's only project, however, for on April 5, 1848, he wrote his publishers again, enclosing a manuscript of 313 short incidents for a volume to be called *Anecdotes of the War*. He suggested they be well spaced in printing and on thick paper so that they would make a fair volume.

As for his *Army at Buena Vista*, it was becoming a much more elaborate work than he had at first supposed, but it would be of great interest, he assured Carey and Hart. He had acquired many valuable documents and was continuing his conversations with Eaton, Garnett, and General Taylor. The work was nearly complete.

Thorpe added that he now had more time to devote to writing and he would soon be able to give them a volume for their Library of Humorous American Works if they wished it—and indeed such an effort was the one book Carey and Hart most wanted from him.

Then in May, while he was finishing the third volume of the history of Taylor's campaigns and planning a biography of the old general, he received a letter from his publishers returning the manuscript of the *Anecdotes of the War*. Carey and Hart wrote, kindly enough, that the first two volumes of the history had been a financial failure and that they were unwilling to continue publishing his work.

Thorpe replied at once and in equally gentle form that he was mortified to learn of their losses. He expressed not the slightest dissatisfaction with Carey and Hart, nor did he complain of the personal disappointment he must have

¹ Original dated March 8, 1848, in the library of the New York Historical Society, as are the letters of April 5 and May 16 which follow.

felt. Thorpe never succeeded in having the third volume of his history published, thus leaving incomplete a project he had hoped (naïvely, perhaps, for he was no historian) would be the definitive work on Taylor's campaigns in Mexico.

2

Neither Thorpe's books nor his newspaper publishing brought him the financial reward he wanted; consequently, he turned increasingly to political activity for the next few years. Taylor's presidential campaign took more and more of Thorpe's time. Early in June the Whig convention in Philadelphia nominated Taylor as its candidate for president. Then in mid-July the Whigs in Baton Rouge met to ratify General Taylor's nomination "by the people at large," and Thorpe was one of the two secretaries elected for the local organization.²

After Carey and Hart's rejection of the anecdotes of the war, Thorpe decided they need not be lost labor but could be made to serve Taylor's campaign. Probably through a friend in Philadelphia he submitted the collection to D. Appleton and Company, who quickly published them as *The Taylor Anecdote Book* over his old pen name, "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." Many of the anecdotes had nothing to do with Taylor, but they did concern the Mexican War, and Thorpe added a brief life of the general and an eleven-page appendix of Taylor's political letters.

Thorpe's preface, dated July, 1848, expresses briefly his idea of the nature and use of history: "There are two kinds of history, one of which comprehends events of vast and extended importance, while the other treats of the individuals who have, in these events, acted a conspicuous part. The former addresses itself more particularly to the philosopher and moralist; the latter interests all classes alike." For his work Thorpe chose biographical history, not

² Baton Rouge *Gazette*, July 15, 1848.

only because of its broad popular appeal and consequent political lure, but also because his own interest was in character and incident. His little book, he hoped, would rescue many acts "of patriotism, of bravery, and of fortitude, worthy of all emulation."

The book opens with a biographical sketch of Taylor, whom the Mexican War, Thorpe wrote, had called from obscurity to the admiration of the world. His conduct never failed to exhibit his "untiring firmness of purpose, clear judgement, strict integrity, and warm humanities." While Thorpe's evaluations are campaign propaganda before they are biography, still their enthusiasm expresses Thorpe's sincere and warm regard for the old general, whom he knew well.

The anecdotes themselves are all short, often of only a few lines, unconnected to one another and with no apparent order in their arrangement. None of them has any complexity of structure nor shows any attention to form. One sample will indicate the quality of the whole:

A very brave soldier in the ranks, was in the habit of drinking too much. His colonel remonstrated with him: "Tom," said he, "you are a bold fellow and a good soldier, but you will get drunk." "Colonel," replied Tom, "how can you expect all the virtues of the human character combined, for only seven dollars a month!"

The anecdotes throughout show Thorpe's delight in the American common soldier's quick wit and raffish good sense. Other sketches tell of Mexican barbarity, American bravery, and of the hopes of Manifest Destiny: for example, after its appearance in *Our Army on the Rio Grande*, *Our Army at Monterey*, and twice in the *Daily National*, Thorpe reprinted once again the sermon of the Reverend Captain R. A. Stewart.

Thorpe's friend Lewis Gaylord Clark reviewed the book in September's *Knickerbocker* with praise disproportionate to its merits, and Whig newspapers wrote of it with ap-

proval. It remains, however, a little book of only passing interest.

Thorpe's activities in support of Taylor extended from his Baton Rouge studio all the way to the New York papers. *The Courier and Enquirer* announced October 10: "We commence today the publication of a brief life of Gen. Taylor by T. B. Thorpe, Esq., who is a resident of Baton Rouge, and of course, has had an opportunity of collecting materials for the work, not always in the reach of Gen. Taylor's biographers."³

Shortly after Taylor's election in November, 1848, friends and well-wishers of Thorpe, in an attempt to assure him an appropriate political reward for his labor, attempted to reinforce the sentimental attachment of his fortune to Taylor's. Thorpe's friends began to acclaim him as the first to mention Taylor as a candidate for the presidency.

In a lengthy letter to the Baton Rouge *Gazette* some anonymous citizen then tried to correct the perspective of the disputants by writing that it was ridiculous to give the credit to any one person: officers with the army along the Rio Grande had mentioned the possibility in the winter of 1845-1846, and among newspapers the New York *Mirror* had been the first to suggest Taylor as a candidate. But the writer did give Thorpe credit for being among the earliest local supporters:

T. B. Thorpe, Esq., then editor of the *Tropic*, was the first person in New Orleans who in a newspaper, mentioned Gen. Taylor's name in connection with the presidency. This was done immediately after his (Mr. Thorpe's) return from Mexico. On the 24th of June an article appeared in the *Jeffersonian* highly abusive of Genl. Taylor's conduct in the battles of the 8th and 9th, commenting the next day (the 25th of June) on said article Mr. Thorpe closed his remarks as follows:

"We may say again that any attempt to persecute Genl. Taylor or lessen his high standing before the people of the United States, *will most certainly make him president of the*

³ Copeland, *Kendall of the Picayune*, 158.

United States. Let 'Old Rough and Ready' alone, he is a hero, and he cannot be slandered out of his position by all the presses in the world." ⁴

This reasonable letter settled the matter as far as the debate in the *Gazette* was concerned. Thorpe was assured, locally at least, of his recognition as an early and ardent Taylor supporter.

While Taylor was still in town, Thorpe also began a portrait (in oils) of the general. It was an ambitious project—a full length canvas—and Thorpe worked carefully at it. Local tradition had it that the picture was unfinished when Taylor left for Washington and that Thorpe used his own stocky body and short legs as a model to complete the work.⁵ Probably at this same time Thorpe completed a smaller portrait of the general, which, undated and unsigned, is now in the possession of Mrs. William Shirley Fulton of Dragoon, Arizona.

Shortly before Taylor departed for the national capital, late in January, 1849, a group of townspeople called on him to pay a parting tribute of their respect to Baton Rouge's most distinguished citizen, the President-elect. When the group had gathered, Thorpe stepped forward to announce that he had been deputed by his fellow citizens to speak for them. He expressed his group's sorrow at parting and their joy at so auspicious a farewell, assuring the general he left only friends behind and wishing him all health and prosperity.⁶

With this little speech, Thorpe's personal contact with Taylor ended. His first meeting with the general had been outside Matamoros, in old Mexico, early in June, 1846. Throughout 1848, most of which Taylor spent in Baton Rouge, Thorpe's contacts as biographer and artist for the general had been frequent and intimate. Now Thorpe

⁴ Baton Rouge *Gazette*, November 25, 1848.

⁵ Baton Rouge *State-Times*, October 23, 1914.

⁶ Baton Rouge *Gazette*, January 27, 1849.

hoped that his reputation as writer and artist, as well as his indefatigable support of Taylor, would recommend him for a political appointment worthy of his ambition. Probably, with his customary reticence, he said nothing to Taylor. But after the general left, Thorpe dreamed of foreign service in "Greece, Rome, Florence, or Verona," for he had long desired to go abroad.⁷ At the Baton Rouge studio he worked and waited.

3

One of the problems most troubling to General Taylor was patronage. "Could I gratify and give all places who wanted them; and make everyone rich or happy," he wrote J. J. Crittenden, "it would do away [with] one of the greatest objections I have to said office."⁸ Although Taylor made broad use of the spoils system, he seems not to have worked out any basic policy for the dispensation of jobs. He merely tried to please as many Whigs as he could, without much regard to the faction of the party they had supported. Clay men, Webster men, Toombs men, proslavery men, anti-slavery men, all were recognized. The party was made up of passionately opposed factions. Taylor's approach added no unity and but little strength to the Whigs as a national party. Thus lacking any positive program, he was much remembered for the people he disappointed. And among those he disappointed was T. B. Thorpe.

Taylor had been kept well aware by the Whig newspapers of Baton Rouge of Thorpe's contribution to his campaign. Relying on his own judgment, apparently, he chose for Thorpe a place in the Land Office of New Orleans.⁹

The *Washington Republic* of July 13, 1849, announced that Thomas B. Thorp (spelling the name as it had tradi-

⁷ New Orleans *Picayune*, September 9, 1877.

⁸ Brainerd Dyer, *Zachary Taylor* (Baton Rouge, 1946), 247.

⁹ Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor*, II, 207.

tionally been spelled) had been appointed by the President to be "Register of the Land Office at New Orleans, Louisiana." Perhaps Taylor and Thorpe never discussed a place, and the President did not realize that his offer would be a disappointment. Among Thorpe's friends, however, the story persisted that Taylor had acted ungratefully, that Thorpe had traveled to Washington and made known his desire for a foreign appointment, and that Taylor had refused.¹⁰

Thorpe's two volumes of history, his book of Taylor anecdotes, and his campaign biography for the latter and for the newspapers, as well as his editorial work and stump speaking, had been no small effort. However Taylor judged the work, Thorpe was disappointed.

Thorpe declined the office, visions of a European sojourn dissolving for a second time.¹¹

4

As the Roaring Forties drew to a close, Thorpe settled down to a less frenzied life. Much of his time he spent painting in the studio on Lafayette Street. He slowly completed the portrait of Zachary Taylor. For an engraving after Rembrandt (his teacher Quidor had known the Dutch masters well), he did a "Simeon in the Temple," following Rembrandt's technique of lighting up brilliantly the center of pictorial interest. Also from an engraving he did a portrait of Jenny Lind, who had achieved widespread popularity in the United States under the bright and cynical management of P. T. Barnum. But Thorpe's most original work continued to be on Louisiana subjects, and at Baton Rouge he completed two more paintings of wildcats. One showed a wildcat at the mouth of a hollow rock, waiting to pounce on a wild turkey. The other pictured its cat, severely

¹⁰ See *New Orleans Picayune*, September 9, 1877, and *Spirit*, XXVIII (March 6, 1858), 41.

¹¹ *Washington Republic*, September 21, 1849.

wounded, glaring wildly from the branch of a tree. Here in the minor genre of animal painting Thorpe showed a true, impractical love. It is not known whether these pictures still exist.¹²

During the years at the mid-century Thorpe also continued to write for the newspapers. He apparently did regular editorials for the *Baton Rouge Gazette*, with little John McGrath carrying manuscripts between Thorpe's studio and the printers.¹³ In local politics Thorpe had a reputation as a Whig who was "not ultra" but rather mild in his policies. The Whigs who were "not ultra" in the South in 1850 were those who opposed secession as a remedy for the South's grievances. The Whig party, faction ridden as it was, generally supported compromise, the Union, and moderation. Southern public opinion was settling into a rigidity which eventually silenced most local criticism of local ways. But in 1850 the Southern Whigs could plead for the national interests above regional interests. Whig papers frequently denounced Southern politicians in Congress as demagogues and characterized their speeches as gasconade.¹⁴

Taylor himself opposed the remedy of the Southern radicals, Southerner though he was. Alexander H. Stephens and Robert Toombs of Alabama, both Whigs, called on Taylor early in 1850 in an attempt to get him to agree to Clay's compromise measures and to give up his own plan of allowing the entrance of California with a constitution prohibiting slavery. Taylor refused to give up his plan. Stephens and Toombs in their anger threatened to withdraw from Congress and dissolve the Union. Taylor met their intransigence by replying that he himself would head the armed forces of the nation to put down any such rebellion.

Thorpe, then, continued to oppose "ultraism"—fiery speeches and threats of secession—by expressing a mild and

¹² *Spirit*, XX (July 27, 1850), 270-71.

¹³ *Baton Rouge State-Times*, October 23, 1914.

¹⁴ Cole, *The Whig Party in the South*, 174.

moderate policy in the *Gazette*. Thorpe was a citizen of the nation, and the idea of secession seemed to him quite monstrous.

The Thorpe home in Baton Rouge during the years at mid-century was "a neat and beautiful white cottage," shaded by trees and ornamented with a fenced flower garden at the rear. His family numbered four. An unnamed visitor from Thibodaux, in southern Louisiana, wrote of Maria Thorpe that she was "refined and accomplished," observing that the home showed not only neatness but good taste.¹⁵ The two children completed the family. Anna was eleven in 1850 and young Thomas six.

Strangers who called at the studio would find Mr. Thorpe long-bodied, short-legged, and thick-set. The New Orleans artist, Garbeille, had fashioned a caricature statuette of Thorpe (whose appearance lent itself delightfully to exaggeration) and sent it to Porter, who was hugely amused. Thorpe's face reminded one of Hogarth, wrote the visitor from Thibodaux, who continued, "He has a very intellectual blue eye . . . , his forehead is high and broad . . . ; his countenance beams with benevolence and humor."

However, Thorpe's good humor did not prevent him from telling his visitor he had found publishing his own newspaper politically disappointing. The interview, recorded for Porter's *Spirit*, concluded with the observation that the people of Louisiana would be pleased if Thorpe were placed in a high position so that he would have leisure to devote to artistic and literary endeavors. Thorpe's talents, Porter's correspondent wrote, "might yet produce works creditable to the nation and particularly to Louisiana."¹⁶ The question of Thorpe's political reward in Louisiana was not yet closed.

During the Baton Rouge years Thorpe again began to do some occasional writing for the national magazines. His

¹⁵ *Spirit*, XX (July 27, 1850), 270-71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

"Reminiscences of Seargeant [*sic*] Smith Prentiss of Mississippi," which Porter printed in the August 3, 1850, *Spirit*, is interesting for the inferences one may draw about Thorpe's own experiences in moving South.

Prentiss was born in Portland, Maine, in 1808, educated at Gorham Academy and Bowdoin, studied law with Judge Wright of Cincinnati, and then went to the South where he became a tutor at the Natchez home of Mrs. William B. Shields. Like Thorpe, he had moved to the South as a young man, to establish himself and make his home. For Prentiss' obituary Thorpe reconstructed imaginatively the young man's first experiences in Mississippi:

In his early career, I consider Mr. Prentiss both fortunate and unfortunate. I have often imagined the shrinking but proud boy living unnoticed and unknown among the wealthiest citizens of the South. Buried in the obscurity of his humble school, he looked out upon the busy world and measured the mighty capacity of his own soul with those whom society had placed above him. I think I see him brooding over his position, and longing to be free, as the suffocating man longs for the boundless air of heaven.

The fervor of Thorpe's imagination recalls the passion of his own letters in 1837 to John William Burruss, letters full of brooding ambition and painful sensitivity to his own uneasy financial position.

Consequently, Prentiss' eventual triumph Thorpe recorded with unconcealed delight:

The era was one of extravagance, the virgin soil of Mississippi was pouring into the laps of her generous sons untold abundance, there were thousands of her citizens, full of health and talent, who adorned the excesses of living by the tasteful procurements of wealth, and the highest accomplishments of mind. Into this world Prentiss entered, heralded by naught save his own genius. The heirs of princely fortunes, the descendants of heroes, men of power and place, of family pride, of national associations were not more proud, more gallant, than was Prentiss, for "he was reckoned among the noblest Romans of them all."

At the time Thorpe wrote these observations he was working vigorously for the Whigs. Perhaps it seemed to him that Prentiss' career offered some hopeful parallels with his own. Thorpe had not yet run for office himself, but his work had been rewarded with the early postmastership at Vidalia and, in a way, by Taylor's offer of a place as Register of the New Orleans Land Office. His refusal of the place and his vision of Prentiss' achievement (whom he saw as one "reckoned among the noblest Romans of them all") hint how high his ambitions still were in 1850.

Throughout 1851 Thorpe continued to mark time. He kept at his painting, at editorial work for the *Gazette*, and did some writing. His "Incidents in the Life of Audubon," which was done for *Godey's Lady's Book*, shows how deftly he could turn his hand at the craft of popular journalism. Louis Godey's magazine specialized in pointedly moralistic and sentimental articles and stories for apparently witless females. Thorpe prepared the article carefully for its audience. The prose was highly mannered, showing a great deal of "taste," most of it bad, and a good many useful clichés. Audubon as a subject offered Thorpe an opportunity to talk of birds and beauty: Thorpe observed that birds offer examples of "almost Christianized society. They are married, and are given to marriage." Thus with one winging swoop the ladies of Thorpe's audience were uplifted by analogy, and if the piety was fraudulent and the natural history bogus, surely Louis Godey was not troubled, for such was his specialty.

On the Hustings in Louisiana

EARLY IN 1852 THORPE'S YEARS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY and his associations with General Taylor brought their first financial reward. In March Mr. D. L. Rivers of Concordia Parish introduced a motion in the Louisiana House of Representatives to purchase Thorpe's large portrait of President Taylor, who had died in the summer of 1850. Mr. Rivers placed a value of fifteen hundred dollars on the picture but added that he was willing that the House decide the final amount. In his speech from the floor he offered two reasons why the state should own the picture: first, the artist who had painted it was a native of the country, and the purchase would serve to encourage local talent; second, Thorpe's writing had done much to elect Taylor. This last reason was too much for the Democratic opposition, and their stalwart, Mr. Michael Ryan, rose in a political passion to oppose the purchase: "He denounced every thing and every person that encouraged native talent, thanked his God that he had not voted for General Taylor,

and considered the fact that the artist who executed this work . . . was a native of the country and . . . a friend of General Taylor a good reason why, this Legislature . . . should not purchase it.”¹

But Mr. Ryan’s ritualistic wrath was not shared by all his Democratic colleagues. The resolution passed 57 votes to 10 to purchase the picture for one thousand dollars, a good price for a portrait at the time.

Shortly after the picture was purchased, on March 23, 1852, Thorpe’s stepfather, Charles Albert Hinckley, died in New York. No doubt to help his mother arrange family financial affairs, as well as to attend to his own interests, Thorpe spent several months in the city in the summer of 1852.

His writing, too, received further attention. Perhaps privately feeling that Carey and Hart had neither advertised nor distributed his volumes vigorously enough, he conferred with D. Appleton and Company about the feasibility of a revised and enlarged edition of his sketches.²

Thorpe’s trip north also provided him an opportunity to speak with Northern Whigs about the nomination of a candidate for the coming election. The national Whig convention met at Baltimore June 16, and immediately a contest between the Northern and Southern wings of the party began.³ The leading contenders were Millard Fillmore, the hapless Daniel Webster, and General Winfield Scott who, like Taylor, was a Mexican War hero, but a hero whom Thorpe did not favor. Fillmore, during his term of office after Taylor’s death, had pleased the Southern Whigs by his acceptance of the Compromise of 1850, particularly in his enforcement of the unhappy Fugitive Slave Law. Thus much of his support was from the South. Webster, too, had

¹ Baton Rouge *Gazette*, March 6, 1852.

² See letters from Thorpe to Henry C. Baird, dated Baton Rouge, May 23, 1852, and New York, August 31, 1852. The originals of all letters to Baird are in the Pennsylvania Historical Society Library.

³ Cole, *The Whig Party in the South*, 245.

declared his acceptance of the Compromise, but the movement for Scott had originated almost entirely in the North. The general's views on the Fugitive Slave Law were unknown, a necessary strategy to retain the support of the Northern Whigs, who were largely anti-slavery.⁴

Privately, various Southern Whigs were assured of Scott's acceptance of the Compromise. Then they won unexpected victories at the convention in the matters of committees, credentials, and most important, the platform. In return they finally conceded to the Northern wing the choosing of a candidate, and Scott was selected.

To many old Whigs, Scott's nomination was a bitter disappointment: after he had secured his place, two of the Louisiana delegates refused to act and had to be replaced. To a state not wholly satisfied with the Whig candidate, Thorpe, the staunch party man, returned in September.

Late in the month he made his first address to a large crowd assembled in front of the Baton Rouge courthouse. After recounting several of the anecdotes for which he was famous, he came to the problem of what the Louisiana Whigs were to think of Scott. He had left for the North, he said, with some prejudice against Scott, but in his travels "he visited the GENERAL and had every prejudicial sentiment dissipated." ⁵

Thorpe, like many other stalwart Whigs, followed the policy of supporting Scott actively to help maintain the already precarious party unity. However, there was little interest in the campaign throughout the South. Thorpe was one of a group of speakers who toured central Louisiana early in October trying to arouse enthusiasm for General Scott. A barbecue was held at Greenburg, a village in St. Helena Parish, northeast of Baton Rouge. There gathered the local Whigs, plus others from St. Tammany, Washington, East and West Feliciana parishes, representatives of an

⁴ *Ibid.*, 223-24.

⁵ Baton Rouge *Gazette*, October 2, 1852.

area Thorpe knew well and loved. Here at Greenburg the country people were addressed by D. F. Kenner, G. W. Waterson, Thorpe, and others.⁶

The next week the indefatigable Thorpe spoke at Plaquemine, a river town across the Mississippi and a few miles down stream from Baton Rouge. Once the little town was stuffed with people, the Gulf Coast rains began to fall and continued all through the day and into the night. The ladies sought shelter in the homes of friends or in the courthouse, but the men, "unmindful of water were attentive to the sound arguments of Messrs. BENJAMIN, KENNER, and THORPE."⁷ The Whig party regulars in Louisiana were doing their best to whip up enthusiasm for the Scott-Graham ticket.

In spite of barbecues and speeches in the rain, the vote was light in Louisiana and throughout the South in the November election. Scott was defeated; he carried only two Southern states—Kentucky and Tennessee.

The defeat in Louisiana was particularly painful to the Whigs. The state had just adopted a new constitution, and the Whigs claimed it as their production. As the party of the principal slaveholders, they had advocated the apportionment of representation on the basis of the total population, including slaves. The problem of representational apportionment was another monster born of slavery, producing much wonderfully tortured reasoning. The Whigs won their point, and they expected the victory would assure them political control of the state.

Whig editors blamed Scott's defeat on the light vote. It did not mean, they argued, that Whig principles of internal improvements, spread of industry, and the preservation of the Union had been renounced in the South. The state elections were to be held in less than two months after the national elections, and the Louisiana Whigs looked forward

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, October 9, 1852.

to the opportunity to show the real party strength and to reorganize after the recent defeat.

2

Throughout his long years as an active Whig in Louisiana, Thorpe had been moving, perhaps with mixed feelings, toward actual candidacy. Now, in the 1852 elections, he arrived, in what appears to be a planned series of moves, at another opportunity for recognition and achievement.

The first step was a notice in the Whig newspapers of Baton Rouge. In mid-November, 1852, a few of Thorpe's friends offered his name as a senatorial candidate for the next legislature. The advertisement continued to appear for two weeks, and both the *Baton Rouge Comet* and the *Gazette* carried editorials in Thorpe's favor.

Then on November 27 the *Gazette* printed a letter from a friend of Thorpe suggesting that, instead of nominating Thorpe for the office of state senator (an honor he would decline in favor of a distinguished citizen of an adjoining parish), he be nominated for the office of State Superintendent of Schools. In support of Thorpe his friend wrote that Thorpe's talents and interests fitted him to be a leader in education; he recalled Thorpe's devotion in his newspapers to the cause of public schools, his literary achievements which fitted him for such an office, and his national reputation as a writer, which made it appropriate that the state should honor him.

The editor of the *Gazette* added his support to the suggestion. He did not know, he wrote, whether Thorpe would decline to run for the senate or not. But he was of the opinion that the new office suggested for Thorpe was more suitable, considering his tastes and interests.

The Whig State Convention was held at Baton Rouge on November 29, with an eminent local Whig, Judge J. M. Elam, presiding. During the course of the meeting Judge

Elam himself, who was a resident of Baton Rouge, came down from the rostrum to nominate Thorpe for the office of State Superintendent of Education. The only other nomination was that of H. C. Castellanos, who proposed L. Placide Canonge, a popular young New Orleans Creole of literary ambitions.

At his nomination Thorpe was called upon to address the convention. Thorpe rose before the group which knew him as an indefatigable campaigner to say that, although he had made some speeches for the Whig cause (an understatement which brought roars of laughter), "it was rather a novel thing for him to have to speak for himself, and he must, therefore, be excused."⁸

In the balloting which followed only the seventh of the ten New Orleans districts voted for Canonge. The other nine New Orleans districts and all state parishes voted for Thorpe.

The short time between the nominations and the election did not give the candidates much time to campaign. They generally made use of printed circulars and letters to newspapers to express their views. Neither Thorpe nor his Democratic opponent, J. H. Carrigan, indulged in any personalities. Thorpe's letter for the state Whig papers affirmed his belief that a common-school education should be made available to all. Louisiana's mistake, he wrote, had been in endowing universities before there were proper primary schools to prepare students for higher education.

The state election followed late in December. By the twenty-eighth the *Daily Comet* reported returns from four local precincts, showing that Thorpe had carried the town of Baton Rouge against Carrigan by a vote of 344 to 293 but had lost in the outlying precincts.

Five days later the Whig *Comet* sadly recorded, "Sufficient is already known of the recent State elections to make it certain that the Executive officers under the New Constitution

⁸ *Ibid.*, December 4, 1852.

will all be from the Democratic party." The Whig party, as an effective political organization in the state of Louisiana, was all but annihilated in the election. Thorpe's hopes for a high place in the state government fell with the Whigs.

3

After Carey and Hart's refusal of his third book on the Mexican War, Thorpe for a time did almost no writing. The refusal had been depressing in itself, and also the fever of his political speech making and campaigning left little leisure. But in early May, 1852, just before he left for New York during the hectic days of Scott's campaign, something happened to make him turn his attention to his sketches again.

The firm of Carey and Hart was dissolved in 1849 (Edward L. Carey had been dead since 1845). A nephew of Edward L. Carey, Henry Carey Baird, continued as partner in the enterprise, and when the firm was divided he received as part of his share of assets the copyright and plates of Thorpe's *Mysteries of the Backwoods*. Early in May, 1852, Baird wrote Thorpe to ask if he would be interested in buying the plates and rights. Thorpe replied that he was expecting to leave late in May for the North and would call to discuss the matter.

While he was in New York in the summer, Thorpe called on Baird, got his offer to sell, and then saw Appleton's to learn if they would be interested in reissuing his sketches. He planned to correct and revise the *Mysteries* essays, add some of his humorous sketches from the *Spirit* and other sources, and issue his best short work in a single volume. Perhaps Thorpe pointed out that his earlier books had moved slowly in part because Carey and Hart had failed to support the sales vigorously. Appleton's expressed an interest. Then Thorpe wrote Baird on August 31, saying that only the illustrations would be of value, not the reading

matter, which was to be revised. Therefore he was willing to pay only \$75 for the plates instead of the \$100 Baird asked.

Baird did not reply, and Thorpe wrote again from New York September 3 repeating his offer. He was planning to leave for the South within a few days. Again Baird did not accept Thorpe's offer, and Thorpe returned to Louisiana and the fall and winter elections.

In the summer of 1853, following his defeat in the December, 1852, elections, Thorpe again spent several months in New York. Now that he seemed to have nothing to hope for in Louisiana, the publication of his sketches assumed a new interest for him. On September 15 he wrote Baird once more to say that he had completed arrangements with a New York publisher (he referred to Appleton's) "to publish my sketches complete, of which those included in the volume of 'The Mysteries,' form about one third." He could not pay in advance but offered to sign a note for the \$100 Baird asked. This was to be paid from the first income from his proposed volume. Again Baird refused.

Thorpe wrote Baird from New York once more in September. Then, late in October, he sent a long, nervously eager letter explaining that he wanted to republish his sketches primarily because there were many errors in the *Mysteries* which he felt destroyed "the literary as well as the commercial value of the work." His aim, Thorpe wrote, was not to gain any "pecuniary advantage" through republication of his sketches but "to bring them out correctly before the public." His offer was the best he could afford at the time. He added that Baird's refusals were resulting in their both losing favorable opportunities.

Finally Baird relented to some degree, and on November 2 Thorpe wrote to accept the terms. He regretted, he said, that he could not pay Baird the money due him on the plates. The same day Thorpe wrote his old friend Abraham Hart to thank him for his letter of explanation of Baird's

financial interests in the plates, which Thorpe said he had misunderstood. Thus by the end of 1853 Thorpe was able to continue his plans to issue an enlarged and corrected volume of his sketches.

4

But planning for the publication of his sketches was not the most important project Thorpe had under way in New York during the latter months of 1853. After his defeat in the December, 1852, elections, he was again faced with the necessity of making some plan for himself and his family. Further, his stepfather was dead, and his mother perhaps desired his return to New York. Finally, sometime during 1853, his third child was born, a daughter, Dordie Rebecca.

He discussed with the Harper brothers the possibility of writing for their *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Fletcher Harper suggested that a series of articles on the South and on natural history, with some illustrations provided by Thorpe himself, would be welcome. The first effort, "Sugar and the Sugar Regions of Louisiana," over 20 pages long, appeared in the November issue. The article was the result of careful preparation: Thorpe wrote of sugar planting as he knew it in Louisiana, but to his own observation he added much careful research. With an article accepted by *Harper's* and more welcome, Thorpe had some business to watch over in New York. Opportunities for financial security must have seemed greater than they did in Louisiana. Both he and his wife, however, found the Northern climate unhealthful and seem to have preferred the South as a place to live.

Porter reviewed Thorpe's article in *Harper's* at length in the November 12 *Spirit of the Times* and greeted with enthusiastic delight Thorpe's return to writing. He recalled Thorpe's early work for his own paper and credited him with being the first and most successful writer from the

South to give the North a "true idea of Southern life and pursuits." Porter's sketch hinted that Thorpe was considering making New York his permanent residence. Obviously Thorpe had seriously discussed his plans with his old friend.

After what appears to be long and painful indecision, Thorpe traveled back to the South and quietly moved his family to New York. The move was unsettling for his family as well as for him. He loved Louisiana—a love which continued to show in his writing and painting throughout the rest of his life. He had lived in the South since before his marriage, and his children had known no home except Louisiana. But apparently he felt that he had nothing more to hope for in the South and that he must for practical reasons return to New York.

Apparently the move took place in the summer or fall of 1854. The difference between the Louisiana and the New York winters was an unhappy experience. On February 1, 1855, Thorpe wrote Baird that the change from a southern to a northern climate "has not only prostrated me but all my family, and I have been unable to attend to any business for some time." The necessity to rebuild a new life away from Louisiana was agonizingly painful to the whole family, it would appear.

Thorpe did not exaggerate his own and his family's sickness, nor was ill health the worst of their disasters. In the fall, October 4, 1855, his wife, Annie Marie Thorpe died. She was only thirty-six. Hers is the first grave in what is now a large family plot in Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery.

The Image of the South

DURING THE WINTER OF 1853-1854 THORPE CONTINUED to write for *Harper's* and to work at his manuscripts, meanwhile completing arrangements for his family's move to New York. After his article on "Sugar and the Sugar Regions of Louisiana," he wrote a curious work entitled "The Case of Lady Macbeth Medically Considered: A Western Sketch," which appeared February, 1854. It was another humorous portrayal of life and character in the Southwest, the tale of a country doctor whom Thorpe represented as having an unusual interest in Elizabethan literature in general and in Shakespeare in particular. The doctor was asked to read a paper before the county medical association. He presented a medical examination of the case of Lady Macbeth. Her strange and unnatural ambition, he suggested tentatively, was a result of her never having had a child. But the fault, and consequently the cause of the tragedy, lay with her doctor:

Why did he not express confidence in his ability to cure?

Why did he not prescribe with seeming promptness?

Why did he not confuse the waiting gentlewoman with dark letter and unmeaning terms?

Why did he not, in short, as in duty bound, make an impression and make a bill?

The listening doctors were puzzled. Their district was thinly populated, yet they were surprised to discover that not one among them was acquainted with the deranged gentlewoman.

The piece was the only attempt Thorpe made to create a humorous Western character for the brothers Harper, who were waxing fat through the republication of bargain-rate (or pirated) English novels. They did not print much fiction for which they would have to pay. Furthermore, their own melancholy sense of humor, which flickered darkly in the monthly "Editor's Drawer," would not have appreciated the gross and extravagant frontier characters Thorpe had created for the *Spirit* and the *Concordia Intelligencer*. The Harpers had hired Lewis Gaylord Clark in 1852 to do their "Editor's Drawer," but as soon as the religious press, more interested in propriety of language and content than in the morality of money making, complained of Clark's profanity and "matter not in the highest degree delicate," the Harpers discharged him.¹ Thorpe's blend of humor, fantasy, satire, and realism was passing strange in so genteel a magazine.

In March *Harper's* printed his "Cotton and Its Cultivation," an attempt to describe for the Northern reader something of the economic and social life of the South. In it Thorpe again expressed his admiration for the planter and his society:

The cultivation of the soil being the earliest as well as the noblest of pursuits, it seems to create a manliness and patriotism in those who follow it. The Southern planter presents the agriculturalist in the most dignified form. He directs, he plows, he sows, he reaps, and yet he does nothing of mere physical labor.

¹ Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*, 314.

For Thorpe the Southern plantation provided an admirable place for the life of the gentleman. Next, Thorpe described life among the Negroes on the plantation. For his national audience he chose the time-setting as Christmas. He recreated the life of the slave as simple, carefree, and happy under the patriarchal shelter of the master and his family:

On such occasions, the "stately mistress" and her "aristocratic daughters" may be seen assisting, by every act of kindness and displaying in the most charming way the family feeling and patriarchal character of our Southern institutions: while the negroes, on their part, never feel that they are duly and affectionately remembered unless the whole family, or most of its members are present, to witness and participate in their enjoyments.

Thorpe simplified and idealized the condition of the Negroes' existence. Of the institution of slavery, however, he expressed no approval. He himself was pleased particularly with the social forms and manners of plantation life. His more complete judgment of slavery he was now planning to express in the form of a novel.

Returning to the subject of the cotton economy, he examined rapidly the economic relationship between the planters and the English manufacturers. He hoped to see the United States spinning its own cloth some day. Georgia, he noted, was beginning to industrialize, a process he hoped to see extended until the South should become an economically independent section.

After the article on cotton Thorpe wrote no more for *Harper's* until November, 1854, when his short "General Taylor's Residence in Baton Rouge" appeared. During the middle of the year he was busy preparing two books for the press.

2

Thorpe's next volume, *The Hive of "The Bee-Hunter,"* was a collection of his sketches, which D. Appleton and

Company published in the spring of 1854. In his subtitle, *A Repository of Sketches, Including Peculiar American Character, Scenery, and Rural Sports*, and in his preface Thorpe stated what he had attempted to do in his work. First, he hoped to give those "unacquainted with the scenery of the southwest, some idea of the country, its surface, and vegetation." The great forests, prairies, and rivers of the Southwest, he wrote, were expressions of nature of a type to fill the beholder with "wonder and awe."

The significance of the vast Western continent in the creation of American character was Thorpe's second concern. Thorpe defined his goal with some precision. He was articulate about the substance of his art, and through his statement it is possible to see his own unique contribution to American letters. Among the humorists and realists of the Old Southwest Thorpe made the most conscious and elaborate attempt to define concretely in art the Western American character. This character he felt was relatively untouched by European civilization, a fact which boded well for the world's future. What the Western character promised was not yet quite discernible, but what the man of the New World was becoming emerged with increasing clarity from the mists of the future:

Here, in their vast interior solitudes, far removed from trans-Atlantic influences, are alone to be found, in the more comparative infancy of our country, characters truly *sui generis*—truly American.

What man would be, uninfluenced by contact with the varied associations of long civilization, is here partially demonstrated in the denizens of the interior of a mighty continent.

The discovery of America,—its vast extent,—and its developing destiny,—present facts, which far surpass the wildest imagery of the dreamers of the olden times.

There are growing up, in these primitive wilds, men, whose daily life and conversation, when detailed, form exaggerations; but whose histories are, after all, only the natural developments of the mighty associations which surround them.

Thus for Thorpe the Western character was the most significant meaning of America. Growing up far from the subtly corrupting influences of Europe, the frontiersman was nature's truest child. His destiny was to surpass the "wildest imagery of the dreamers of the olden times." His stature was large; exaggeration was natural to him; he received his character from nature at its wildest and mightiest expression on the new continent. Once again through his art Thorpe was helping to shape the myth, still forming and growing, of the American character.

In content the volume is representative of Thorpe's finest achievement. Thorpe added no new sketches, but he collected from the *Mysteries* and from his newspaper and magazine writings the best of his work. His publisher did a handsome job of printing, illustrating, and binding. Through Thorpe's arrangement with Baird, Darley's excellent drawings for the *Mysteries* were used, and to these a few others were added.

The quality of the writing, too, is better than any other work Thorpe did. The sketches republished from newspapers and magazines were revised extensively and intelligently. "The Big Bear of Arkansas," for instance, had appeared in the *Spirit* and, unrevised, in Porter's anthology. Its paragraphs were long, even for an age of long paragraphs, and the conversation was not separated from the descriptive writing. For his own collection, Thorpe broke up the matter into shorter, more logical paragraphs, so that the movement seems swifter and easier.

Furthermore, he corrected various typographical errors. The *Spirit* version of the tale presented at least one interesting typesetter's misreading. The New Orleans sharpers had asked the Big Bear of Arkansas what the principal "game" of Arkansas was. He replied innocently that it was poker, never having heard the word *game* used for the animals of the hunt. They laughed, and he added perhaps they preferred "chickens and rolette," a meaningless phrase.

In the corrected version Thorpe changed the phrase to "checkers and roulette," making the pun on the word *game* as he originally intended.

Thorpe revised his sentences carefully and, in some sketches, extensively. Many are shortened. Some are changed in their structure for clarity and logic. The choice of words is frequently bettered. In all, the revisions are a distinct improvement. Unfortunately, when "The Big Bear of Arkansas" is reprinted in modern anthologies, the 1841 version is generally used, a version Thorpe never had opportunity to proofread.

Because the book shifts its emphasis from the almost wholly romantic nature essays of the *Mysteries of the Backwoods* to include some of Thorpe's humorous and realistic sketches of Southwestern characters, it offers a rather full statement of his interests and ideas. One sees his search for the American frontier character, his attempt to define it concretely in Louisiana bee hunters or Arkansas squatters, his use of humor when the reality fails the myth, and his movement backward in time (to Mike Fink) or farther West to discover the reality of the legend concerning the apotheosis of man in the wilderness. One finds Thorpe's own blend of realistic reporting and romantic faith in the power of primitive nature. The humor throughout is sure and pleasant, and at times profound, a kind of artistic catalyst for the disparate elements of myth and reality; for Thorpe was possessed of a dream and a vision of the West, and he had traveled to see the troubling reality.

Altogether, the book is a minor but true artistic achievement of the Western dream and an original contribution to American literature. It does not deserve the neglect into which it has fallen, for it is the representative work of the most talented reporter before Mark Twain of life on the Southwestern frontier.

The book was widely reviewed and almost universally approved. The discerning Porter in the *Spirit of the Times*

acclaimed Thorpe for his clarity and simplicity of style, his close observation of nature and character, and his dry humor, which Porter always found particularly captivating. *Harper's* brief notice praised Thorpe as brilliant, "an effective delineator of American scenery and social peculiarities." As a genre piece, *Harper's* review observed, "The work stands in the very highest rank of its kind." Lewis Gaylord Clark in the *Knickerbocker* apparently used Porter's review, added his own praise of Thorpe's pictorial quality of description, and printed a selection from "Wild Turkey-Shooting," one of Thorpe's own favorites. Reviews appeared in *Graham's*, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, *De Bow's Review*, and others.

Through reviews in the magazines of general circulation Thorpe's position on the literary scene of mid-century America was more clearly and accurately defined than had been possible after the publication of any other of his books. He had emerged with *The Hive* of "*The Bee-Hunter*" as a bright and captivating American humorist, an effective stylist, and a discerning and truly creative reporter of scenery, social customs, and character in the Southwest.

3

Thorpe's next book, *The Master's House; a Tale of Southern Life*, was published by T. L. McElrath within less than three months after the appearance of his collected volume of sketches. It appeared under the pseudonym "Logan" perhaps because it expressed opinions on painfully controversial sectional topics and also perhaps because it contained some autobiographical elements. Thorpe wrote within the framework of the romantic and sentimental novel of reform. His one novel, like all of his humorous sketches and most of his magazine articles, arose immediately from his Louisiana years and expressed his interest in and opinions of the society and institutions of the South.

The plot of the novel progresses awkwardly. Thorpe had little ability to construct any literary form more sustained than the short story or the anecdote. Even his histories, simple reportorial narratives as they are, trail away indecisively into obituaries, anecdotes, letters, or other material undigested in the central structure. *The Master's House* depends for its movement on a series of incidents only loosely related to a central plot. The episodic structure also witnesses that Thorpe's first intention was to present and comment on various Southern character types, current problems, and Southern social institutions. If the novel is an artistic failure, it is a legitimate object of interest as the fullest expression of Thorpe's opinions about problems which the politicians North and South found insoluble short of war.

Following *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as it did by about two years, the work was influenced to some degree by that novel of propaganda, but as Thorpe did not see with Mrs. Stowe's simplicity of vision, he did not present his actions and characterizations with Mrs. Stowe's flat directness. He did not offer a remedy for the evil of slavery. He could not simply cast his lot with the abolitionists, but at the same time he saw slavery as a morally indefensible institution.

His conservative and cautious approach he expressed in the final paragraph of his preface:

This volume is dedicated to the lovers of mankind,—to those who desire the highest development, and would, by having the evils of society exposed, learn where to commence the necessary reform. There are defects in our social and political systems that are working evils, which, if not checked, and finally eradicated, must accomplish universal ruin. The remedies, if of the right kind, are neither instant in their operation, nor revolutionary in their character; the first advancement, is the admission that reform is needed, and then the manner of its accomplishment will readily suggest itself.

Thorpe intended his novel very simply to be a novel of reform. The evils he mentions without naming—he meant

slavery and an attendant complex of conditions and attitudes—could not be reformed at once, he saw. But many of his friends in Louisiana would not only not admit that the institution was bad: they would not even admit that the problem was open for discussion. The first step, Thorpe stated quietly, was to admit the wrongs existed.

The central plot of the novel is a sentimental love story, the account of the life of a young North Carolinian, Graham Mildmay. Mildmay, like Thorpe himself, was educated at a New England college where he fell in love with a New England girl. She appointed him two years of Victorian probation, which he spent moving to Louisiana and establishing himself on a new plantation. Then he went North to marry his fiancée and return with her to finish their life in the South.

The girl's fictional character is created largely through sentimental clichés. She is pious, beautiful, delicate, and addicted to fainting under stress. Graham is brilliant (the valedictorian of his class at college), an accomplished orator, wealthy, handsome, thoughtful in his manners. Important for Thorpe's ideal of the Southern hero, Mildmay is pictured as being without the recklessness which, Thorpe felt, frequently characterized Southern youth:

He was popular with all who knew him for his manliness, and seemed to happily combine industrious habits with the cultivated manners and easy bearing, so peculiar to the youth of the South. There was a sense of innate worth, and pecuniary ability about Mildmay, that so frequently distinguishes the highly educated planter from the mere business man. . . .

Mildmay is, in short, the easy, modest, dignified gentleman, charming all with his splendid bearing and representing Southern society's noblest achievement.

In his presentation of other planters who are Graham's and Annie's neighbors in Louisiana, Thorpe shows always his high regard for the type, which he felt was one of the most admirable characters American society was producing.

At the same time he attempts to show that the social life also bred certain weaknesses of character. He noted that the Southern gentleman was not infrequently indolent, high tempered and restive under contradiction, always gallant with women, proud of his ancestry, and lavishly hospitable. (See pp. 19, 148, 149, 153, 388, etc.)

The Southerner's quick temper and inability to accept question or reproof perpetuated the code of conduct which required a duel as the only redress for any kind of insult. Dueling Thorpe disapproved of thoroughly. He used as the catastrophe of the story a duel between Mildmay (who did everything he could to avoid it) and his neighbor Moreton. Mildmay killed his opponent: the result was that Mrs. Moreton was driven mad, Mildmay was tortured by remorse for the rest of his life, and Annie fell into a decline and died.

Thorpe's expression of his attitude toward slavery was sufficiently ambiguous to present a problem to American scholars of a later date. Jennette Tandy in her "Pro-Slavery Propaganda in American Fiction of the Fifties,"² and Francis Pendleton Gaines in *The Southern Plantation* (1926) both list the work as a proslavery novel, which it is not. Shields McIlwaine rightly says that "Thorpe was essentially the early anti-slavery man of the Old South."³

Thorpe did express admiration for the planters, and he did see the Southern Negro as a being in need of the patriarchal guidance of his master. But he did not accept the institution of slavery as morally defensible or as good for either the master or the slave.

During the course of his story Thorpe pointed out several evils which the institution fostered. One of the villains of the piece, Major Dixon, was a slave trader, and Thorpe, following an already established tradition, made him a person not only offensive to Southern gentlemen

² *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, III (January, 1922), 48-69.

³ McIlwaine, *The Southern Poor-White*, 23.

because of his business but also brutal and degraded. Characterizing Dixon by means of his feeling toward Negroes, Thorpe wrote, "He delighted in crushing those in his power, when they resisted, and yet he was equally savage to those who were passive to his will."

In one scene a young Negro girl is returned to Dixon by her purchaser, who found her a poor servant. She is grieved, Dixon knows, over having been parted from her child, but she swears to Dixon that she did not tell her new master that she had a child. Nevertheless, he prepares to whip her. Afterwards, says Dixon, "If I sell you to a sausage-maker you will cry out to be cut up into mince meat before you will come back again to my hands." The scene melodramatically illuminates Thorpe's concept of the wild violence in which the slave trader might indulge and his compassion for the ruin of families that slavery bred.

As further characterization of Dixon, the trader is made to tell the tale of a man who had such a prejudice against educated Negroes that he would go to great lengths to buy such servants just to be able to mistreat them. Such a slave master fascinates Dixon:

He occupied a log-cabin, ate corned pork, and amused himself drinking whiskey, running horses, and hunting niggers. He was a real spirited gentleman, but rather imprudent in whipping, for he used to lay it on when he got mad, so that the nigger never got over it, and that is a foolish wasting of property, for you see Mr. Deputy, there is no feeling in a nigger's hide below the skin, and if you will take time, you can get it all out of his body without touching a vital—but howsomever, the man had a right to kill 'em if he could afford to, for a person should do as he pleases with his own.

Thus Thorpe expresses his horror at the degradation of character and the passion of cruelty slavery made possible.

Finally, in the creation of the elaborate and melodramatic villainy of Dixon, Thorpe gave some form to his vision of the decay of religion in the South. At the same time the

episodes of his sixteenth and seventeenth chapters show how troubling, complex, and ambiguous the problems of guilt and responsibility seemed to him as he examined evil in the society he so much admired.

The village church has stood long neglected and nearly destroyed, becoming eventually (with interesting and perhaps not unconscious symbolism), "the resting-place of domestic animals." A local widow sends her slaves to repair the chapel and invites a famous minister to preach. On the appointed Sunday Dixon happens to be in town, ill, and by the idlest chance he wanders in. He is moved by the sermon, through which he is brought to see the fearful injustice and violence of his life.

After the sermon he recalls the teachings of his childhood:

Dixon's mother was a strict Methodist, and she had been inspired by this feeling in her youth, by the teachings of parents, who claimed, while sitting under the unction of John Wesley's preaching, and listening to his voice "'face to face' that they had been converted from the error of their ways, and convinced of the sin of holding slaves."

In simple and superstitious fear of punishment for his violence and injustice, Dixon renounces gambling and drink.

The next Sunday, beaming with expectation of "a future, sanctified by good resolves," Dixon returns to church, only to have the minister defend slavery as a Biblical institution, defend the right of the master to punish his slave even if he dies under the rod, defend dueling—in short, to offer an elaborate religious rationalization for all local ways and a threatening condemnation of any criticism of those ways.

Thus the church itself fails and becomes the ally of violence and human oppression. The minister had created a consciousness of sin, a vision which could have been a regenerative instrument for Dixon. Then the same minister,

to please his parishioners, sanctifies oppression, destroys the vision of evil, and consequently destroys Dixon as a moral character. Dixon returns to the groggery, where the host compliments him on looking better: "I am better," says Dixon. "I've got clear of them confounded pains, that's troubled me so much: I am now as good as new, and we'll take a drink to celebrate the fact."

As another instance of the cruelty and brutality which the circumstances of slavery fostered, Thorpe examined the relationship between overseer and slave. The master, Mildmay, is loved by his slaves. He is always considerate of their feelings, even buying or selling slaves in order to avoid breaking up families. Eventually he is forced by success itself, that is, the size of his plantation, to give over personal control of slaves to an overseer. In spite of Mildmay's care and quite unknown to him, his overseer, Mr. Toadvine,⁴ is a gross and brutal drunkard. His cruelty causes one of the slaves to run away, but the boy is arrested and Toadvine calls at the jail to pick him up. He leads the boy home by fastening one end of a rope around his neck and the other end to the saddle horn. On the trip back he lashes his horse into a run and drags the Negro to death.

Toadvine's killing of the boy Jack gives Thorpe an opportunity to move from the moral to the political evils of slavery and to discuss the problem of the poor-white, although he does not argue that the institution was responsible for the rise of the poor-white class. As soon as it is learned that Toadvine has killed Jack, several respectable citizens, and some not so respectable, decide to lynch him. He is saved only by Mildmay's arrival and inflexible insistence that the law must be observed. Toadvine is

⁴ An example of how fully Thorpe used his experiences in Louisiana for literary material is the fact that the improbable name *Toadvine*, so appropriate for a villain, is taken from life. The manuscript book in which the Police Jury Records, West Feliciana Parish, were kept indicates that Anthony Toadvine was appointed overseer of the Fourth Road District, September 20, 1841.

jailed and tried for the murder. His lawyer succeeds in packing the jury with town loafers whose sympathies are with creatures like Toadvine. As a class, Thorpe portrays such people as hating Negroes and disliking planters, whose notions of justice seem incomprehensibly persnickety. Consequently, the overseer goes free, much to the disgust of the respectable gentlemen at the trial. Thorpe thus implies that the administration of justice in small Southern towns was frequently in the hands of the most ignorant and bigoted class of citizens. He openly disapproved of their political power and activity.

One of the episodes of the novel recreates an election campaign. The contest for a seat in the state legislature is between the planter Moreton (plainly Whig) and the opposition candidate, Duffy White, who is supported by the "Piny woods" people of Possum Hollow. Mr. Moreton, although quick-tempered, is an honest and high-minded gentleman. He begins his preparation for election by studying "Jefferson's Manual" and arranging his ideas on the new constitution contemplated by his state.⁵

Duffy White is represented as an ignorant and illiterate lout, wholly unfit for the office of a lawmaker. Mr. Moreton's overseer, Colonel Price, traveled through the back country to observe Duffy's campaign. Price reported it was being carried on without mention of issues but merely to prejudice the country people against Moreton.

He (Colonel Price) related, among other things, that there had been "an extra" printed and circulated, that represented Mr. Moreton as a man that wouldn't let his overseers, or any other poor man, come into his presence, unless they held their hats in their hands, and behaved like niggers; that he would not allow said poor man, particularly "if they were from the piny woods," to sit down at his table, but rudely drove them away from his house, or if particularly kind, would send them to the negro quarters, to get something to eat! It was furthermore

⁵ Louisiana had adopted a new state constitution just prior to Thorpe's defeat in the December, 1852, elections.

asserted, that he had started on an electioneering tour, with a suit of clothes on he had borrowed from his overseer; that he had a silver cup and "old brandy" to treat the "aristocracy" with, and a gourd and "sixteen cent whiskey," for the common people; and finally and lastly, that Mr. Moreton's body servant, who accompanied him in his travels around the parish, was present, merely to do the shaking hands with the poor folks, he, Mr. Moreton, being afraid to do it himself, lest he would get the itch, or some other contamination.⁶

Because of his own many campaigns Thorpe's comments on the techniques of manipulating the backwoods voters is of particular interest. He felt that the spread of the franchise to the poverty-stricken and the ignorant caused the control of both local and state affairs to fall into the hands of the worst elements of Southern society.

Moreton once observed to Mildmay that "we have no sufficient power to protect our rights against these irresponsible poor whites." The curious phenomenon of the passionate defense of slavery by those people unable to own slaves and probably even depressed by the institution was observed by Thorpe. He caused his enlightened planter to reject any allegiance with the group. "I see hypocrites at our doors," said Mildmay, "for I mistrust the sincerity of all men, who, owning no negroes themselves, are violent in defense of our peculiar institution." Although Thorpe was interested in the illogic of this attitude, he offered no analysis of the poor-whites' circumstance and their motives.

Nor did Thorpe offer any specific method for the abolition of slavery. He felt that the planters, once they could agree on the need for abolition, as some of them did, were competent to work out a reasonable solution. He felt that the poor-whites were an element of terrifying instability in Southern society. "Upon such wretched social materials, upon such a moral volcano, do we slaveholders exist,"

⁶ Thomas B. Thorpe, *The Master's House; a Tale of Southern Life* (New York, 1854), 338.

Mildmay observes uneasily to Moreton. With some unhappy astuteness, Thorpe attended the rumblings of the coming eruption.

Among other political ideas that Mildmay voiced were the convictions that the union of the states should be preserved and that the South could strengthen itself by diversifying its economy. Both are good Whig tenets. To maintain the Union and to preserve slavery as a purely domestic and local institution, Thorpe had Mildmay even advise that the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law be given up. Mildmay does not himself envision the abolition of slavery. To ease tensions between North and South Thorpe urged caution and forbearance.

Interesting as it may be for its ideas, the novel as a work of art is poor. Perhaps because of its clichés and its sentimentality, it was popular: by 1855 a third edition was published, carrying Thorpe's name on the title page. Clark in the November *Knickerbocker* commended the novel to his readers, but his review was not all praise:

We cannot say that we greatly affect certain portions of the work, which seem to have been suggested by the success which attended similar descriptions in a previous volume of wide celebrity: we cannot but regard these 'Uncle Tom'-itudes as over-done in quantity if not in execution.

Clark was quite right in inferring that Thorpe owed something to Mrs. Stowe in his creation of the good master, the bad master, the overseer, the episode of the slave chase, and the like. In evoking the stock response Thorpe had made use of the stock situations. The structure is episodic, and the language careless and cliché-ridden.

Yet many reviewers saw, in spite of the novel's excesses, the merits of its realism. *Putnam's* reviewer, after writing that the work was "understood to be the production of a well-known literary gentleman who has resided many years in Louisiana, and who cannot be accused of not knowing whereof he speaks," tried to assess Thorpe's aims:

The Master's House was evidently suggested by the success of Uncle Tom, but is in no manner like that work. [But instead] . . . the author's aim appears to depict society and social usages. . . . As a story the book has no merit, as there is next to no story in it; but as a succession of sketches of local scenery and character, it has very considerable merit, and will be likely to attract attention both North and South.⁷

Thus *Putnam's* reviewer perceived accurately the virtues of the work. In spite of its faults, the book showed both moral passion and moral restraint. It depicted with far greater firsthand knowledge than Mrs. Stowe's a peculiar society and its peculiar social usages. Best of all, through the slap-dash sentences a darkly powerful and ambiguous realism glowed. The novel remains an indecisive exploitation of the popular taste. It is both a novel of reform and a sentimental novel; yet its surface of platitudes of character, situation, and style is broken by astonishing outcroppings of realism, satire, and humor. As truly as in the "Big Bear of Arkansas" Thorpe's theme was worth stating, but this time he could not quite find the tale for it. *The Master's House* remains an interesting failure.

The Master's House and *The Hive of "The Bee-Hunter"* serve both to define Thorpe's position as an author and to summarize his contributions and abilities as a writer. The latter collection of sketches contains almost all the pieces Thorpe had ever done in frontier humor—with the one large exception of the "Far West Letters." Along with the work of George Washington Harris, Johnson Jones Hooper, Joseph Glover Baldwin, and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, his sketches stand among the finest productions of the frontier humorists and realists. Thorpe, more than any of the others, was an artist. He was close to the romantic tradition, and his work chronicles a persevering search to find and an elaborate effort to reveal the admirable,

⁷ *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, IV (July, 1854), 112.

even the heroic, in the Western American character. His work is the most complex of all the Southwestern humorists. It ought, indeed, to be accepted as a part of the standard literary tradition of his age.

The Spirit of the Times in New York

LATE IN 1854 THORPE BEGAN, AT FLETCHER HARPER'S suggestion, a series of natural history articles, which he illustrated himself. The first of these, "The Alligator," appeared in the December *Harper's*. The following year six more in the series were published: "The Rattlesnake and Its Congeners" in March; "The Dog, Described and Illustrated" in April; "The Lion and His Kind" in May; "The History and Mystery of Tobacco" in June; "Bears and Bear Hunting" in October; and in December "Remembrances of the Mississippi."

Like his earlier articles on sugar and cotton, these pieces were constructed from some personal observations plus a large amount of research. The essay on the alligator, for instance, quoted Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* on the crocodile; Herodotus, whom Thorpe called the most delightful of historians; Pliny and Strabo; and among the modern scientists, Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, Sir J. Gardiner Wilkinson, Alexander von Humboldt, and Sir Charles

Lyell. Interspersed with the scientific and literary references to alligators were numerous anecdotes of personal recollection and some pseudo-scientific stories from the daily press.

The essays were easy and pleasant in style, popular in approach, and always profusely illustrated. Fletcher Harper, who was the real editor of the magazine, addressed it to "all readers of average intelligence," intending that they should be both entertained and improved. Thorpe's pleasant style and his literary and scientific research helped to set the tone for Harper's family magazine.

Thorpe also contributed an essay on the Indians of the Southwest, "Traditions of the Natchez," to *The Knickerbocker Gallery* in 1855. The volume was a testimonial to Lewis Gaylord Clark, made up of essays by old contributors to the *Knickerbocker* magazine. The proceeds were to be used, according to the preface, to buy for Clark a cottage on the edge of the Hudson. Irving, Holmes, Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, and many lesser figures contributed essays or poems. Thorpe's piece was accompanied by a handsome portrait engraved by J. C. Buttre, after a painting of Thorpe by his friend Charles Loring Elliott.

Thorpe seems to have had some connection with a very strange work published the same year: a fat and scandalous volume titled *A Voice to America*. The first edition gives the author as Frederick Saunders, but the third lists Thorpe as joint author. The preface states that different gentlemen had written the separate chapters and that the book was not the product of any political party. However, its tenets are those of the American Party, as it called itself, or the Know-Nothing Party as its enemies called it.

The Know-Nothings relied much on secrecy, and Thorpe's actual connections with them would be difficult or impossible to uncover after these many years. The party had grown rapidly in Louisiana with the disintegration of the Whig organization. The engineers of the Plaquemines Frauds in Louisiana were accused of transporting numerous

German and Irish voters across the river to swing the district and win the election. It may be, then, that Thorpe's own disappointments turned him for a while to the nativism of the American Party. It is also possible, however, that he had no formal connection with the party, for very shortly he joined actively the newly formed Republican Party and remained with it the rest of his life.

The book provides a rationale for a strangely primitive and mystical vision of America imposing its civilization on the whole world. "There cannot be a doubt that Providence has selected the Anglo-Saxon race to spread the blessings of liberal institutions throughout the world," wrote the anonymous author of the sixth chapter.

This was to be accomplished by a racially pure society, purged of Irish, Germans, and Negroes. "The last fifty years witnessed the influx of hordes of Celts and of inferior German tribes. The effect has been trouble and annoyance." Once the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon stock over the Germanic tribes had been established, a long attack followed on the Irish, the atheistical Germans (who were generally also clodhopper socialists), the Dutch (oddly for a book published in New York), the French, and the Italians. Of Europeans in general, one of the authors wrote, "They are bigoted, false, selfish, cunning, and revengeful." The Catholic church was offered as the second great enemy of America, a charge supported by the claim that the men attended services as armed companies of soldiers.

Frederick Saunders, the author named in the first edition, had done other writing. By trade he was a copyreader for Harper and Brothers, where he could well have met Thorpe. Both the style and the ideas seem very unlike Thorpe's other work, and it is a shame he even lent his name to the project. Apparently, like many another disappointed Whig, he flirted with the Know-Nothings for a while after his return to New York.

In 1856 Thorpe did six more articles for *Harper's*.

Four of these were natural history essays, and the fifth a long review of *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckworth*. Reviewing the autobiography of the mountaineer offered Thorpe another opportunity to return to his search for evidence of the true effect of the wilderness on human nature. Of Beckworth's book he wrote, "This intense desire of the imaginative and enlightened mind to know something of human nature in its wild estate has been most strangely and unexpectedly gratified."

The true quality of the New American character created by the ennobling wilderness had never been satisfactorily captured for literature, Thorpe felt. His own observation of the backwoodsmen of Louisiana and the frontiersmen of Arkansas and Texas had not revealed to him precisely the kind of Western character he expected. Now, rather as a critic than as a writer, he continued the romantic quest.

By the end of 1856 Thorpe had produced seventeen articles for *Harper's*. A few of the pieces were over twenty pages in length, and most of them were between fifteen and twenty pages. Thorpe himself had illustrated them. They were generally carefully prepared and represented a great deal of research. *Harper's* paid for original material at the standard rate of from three to ten dollars a page, which was good for the time, and it is safe to assume that Thorpe's income from his work for the magazine represented a fair amount. Still, writing for magazines at the mid-century was not an ideal circumstance.

Late in 1857 Thorpe joined the editorial staff of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.¹ Leslie, whose real name was Henry Carter, was a wood engraver who had come to the United States in 1848 from England, where he had been chief of the engraving room of the London *Illustrated News*. He found work in New York as an engraver and by 1854 had founded *Frank Leslie's Ladies' Gazette of Fashion*

¹ *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, IV (November 7, 1857), 358 (hereinafter cited as *Leslie's*).

and *Fancy Needlework*. Eager to get on, he nourished a real ambition to establish a weekly miscellany illustrated by news pictures like the London paper for which he had worked. Finally after organizing his art staff, he began *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in December, 1855. The most striking feature of the little sixteen-page folio was its large illustrations for the news stories. The contents were miscellaneous: it had departments devoted to music, drama, the fine arts, the turf, sports in general, army sketches, book reviews, and serial fiction.²

Leslie's news stories were usually sensational, but his interest in drama, music, the arts, and the outdoor life was more continental than that of most American editors of the time. Too, the interest in horse racing, hunting, sports, and military life had been part of the pattern of Southern society Thorpe had enjoyed. Editorial work for *Leslie's* suited Thorpe's temperament as well as his abilities.

2

When Thorpe joined *Leslie's* in the fall of 1857 he had been a widower for about two years. Then the November 7 *Leslie's* reported that he had married Miss Jane Fosdick of New York City. His oldest daughter, Anna, would have been eighteen at the time, his son Thomas thirteen, and the baby Dordie Rebecca four. The new Mrs. Thorpe joined the household at 87 Pineapple Street, Brooklyn, then a pleasant residential suburb where the family had lived since moving from Louisiana.

Thorpe's associations in the New York of the 1850's seem to have been with sportsmen, artists, actors, newspapermen, and writers. The Englishman Henry William Herbert, old friend and fellow contributor to Porter's *Spirit* was a member of the staff of *Leslie's* when Thorpe joined it. Thorpe

² Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (4 vols., Cambridge, 1957), II, 452-53.

spent much time with his lifelong friend, the artist Charles Loring Elliott, mentioning once having dinner with him at the home of the actor William Evans Burton in the mid-fifties. He visited Elliott in Poughkeepsie while the latter painted Mr. Matthew Vassar's portrait "for his contemplated ladies' seminary," and introduced Elliott to John Harper when Harper decided to sit for his portrait.

With other friends he continued his hunting and fishing trips. In 1859 (accompanied by two companions and their guides) he visited John Brown's Tract, a wild and isolated area in upper New York State. Afterwards he wrote an article for *Harper's* on the excursion, describing with infinite gusto the beauties of the scenery, the taste of simple food eaten outdoors and the satisfaction of hard exercise. In spite of painful adjustments, the New York years were becoming good years.

3

After some months with *Frank Leslie's* magazine, Thorpe turned to the practice of law, which he followed from 1858 to 1860. Admission to the bar in New York was regulated by the State Supreme Court, which required that the applicant be a citizen, present evidence of good moral character, sustain an examination upon the various branches of the law, and finally subscribe to and take a constitutional oath of office. Thorpe began his law practice by taking an office in a nest of attorneys and counselors at 25 William Street and later upstairs at 233 Broadway.

His practice was leisurely, perhaps more leisurely than he could have wished, and he found time to contribute some articles to George Ripley and Charles A. Dana's *New American Cyclopaedia* (1858-1863) and to continue his painting. At the National Academy of Design exhibition in the spring of 1859 he showed his *Old Stone Mill, Newport, Rhode Island*.

Then early in 1859 Thorpe made another effort to establish himself financially, this time by buying part interest in a journal of old and pleasant associations, the New York *Spirit of the Times*. The *Spirit*, happily suited to Thorpe's interests, was still a stable and widely circulating weekly. Altogether Thorpe's opportunity to establish himself as editor and publisher of a national magazine promised to be an ideal arrangement.

Thorpe had not written for the *Spirit* during the years of his return to New York but had remained Porter's close friend. Porter reprinted from *Harper's* Thorpe's essay on the alligator and in 1855 his "The Dog" and "Bears and Bear Hunting." Porter, however, was only the editor of the paper, for he had sold the managing interest to John Richards in 1841. The two did not get along well, and after many years Porter left in September, 1856, to found *Porter's Spirit of the Times*. The original *Spirit* continued under the editorship of Edward E. Jones, who had been with it over twenty years, assisted by Richard Hays. After Porter left, Jones continued to reprint Thorpe's natural history essays from *Harper's*: "Something About the Horse" in November, 1856, and "The American Deer" in October, 1858.

Some of Thorpe's inaccurate science in the later piece provoked a controversy which threatened to result in a duel between two Southern readers. After it appeared, a reader from Darien, Georgia, signing himself "Mark," wrote to comment on Thorpe's claim that the doe gave out no scent while she was suckling her young. The peculiarity, Thorpe wrote, was part of the divine order to protect the species, a dispensation which also caused the buck to lose his scent when he lost his horns. "Mark" wrote that this was a beautiful theory but that, in fact, the hounds could trail the doe from the moment she dropped her fawn. As for the bucks losing their scent, "Mark" continued, growing warmer, "by the Lord Harry I believe I can tell a half mile off if my

dogs jump an old buck by their excited cries, whether in velvet or clean rubbed." ³

In the same issue another reader wrote with more acerbity to observe that the power of the doe to control her odor during fawning time was not owing "to those benevolent dispensations of Providence that provide for the helpless, as Mr. Thorpe suggests, but to those dispensations of Providence that do not give to some writers a sufficient share of observation of the habits of wild game to make them safe instructors of the public."

Six weeks later the letter of "H. of L." of Black River, Louisiana, was printed, defending part of Thorpe's article but admitting that the doe could be trailed during the fawning season. As soon as he could get his letter in, the Georgia reader replied that he did not want his remarks construed as a rudeness to Mr. Thorpe but added belligerently that he did disagree with "H. of L.," whom he accused of being deficient in courtesy and good breeding. With the ominous inference that he could correct the deficiency, he signed his name to the letter—Randolph Spalding. To this "H. of L." replied as soon as the mails would allow, saying that he intended no discourtesy to Mr. Thorpe—nobody intended any discourtesy to Thorpe whose fabulous natural history had started the whole affair—but added in postscript darkly that he wished the editor to give Mr. Spalding his name if the latter desired it. With this letter the matter disappeared from the pages of the *Spirit*, and if blood flowed over whether or not doe can control their odor in fawning season, the paper fails to record it.

Porter lived less than two years after establishing his own journal. Then late in January, 1859, John Richards, owner of the original *Spirit*, died. The February 12 issue informed the readers that the *Spirit* would continue its weekly publication and printed a letter from Thorpe about Richards.

³ *Spirit*, XXVIII (October 30, 1858), 447.

The next week the first number of volume twenty-nine appeared, announcing that the owners of the New York *Spirit of the Times* were now Edward Jones, T. B. Thorpe, and Richard Hays. Jones and Thorpe were to edit the paper with Jones as the senior editor.

Thorpe was reintroduced to those readers who might not have known him (his dates are slightly wrong) as author of one of the most popular sketches ever written of South-western life, "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter":

It inaugurated not only a new style of writing, but subsequently, through innumerable Southern and Western Correspondents, brought together the most truly original and genuine American humor that the literature of the country can boast. The author of 'Tom Owen' followed up his success with the 'Big Bear of Arkansas,' and through succeeding years had made the columns of this paper genial by his ability, and always claiming, by adoption, a large place in the affections of "The Spirit" readers. By a singular train of circumstances the two persons so long associated in the immediate business of conducting "The Spirit" and one of its earliest and most popular correspondents, and always warm personal friends, unite to carry it on. . . .

To credit Thorpe with inaugurating the sketches of South-western life was not accurate considering Longstreet's accomplishment and the popularity of the Crockett books, but Thorpe more than any other writer had given literary stature to the genre, as both Griswold and Duyckinck had recognized by including Thorpe in their anthologies.

The reminiscent mood Jones had struck in his editorial set the tone for the months to follow. Neither the *Spirit's* editors nor its regular correspondents were young men any more, and they began recalling palmier days and anecdotes of the journal's earlier life, all with the aim of assessing the *Spirit's* significance and stimulating the new investment. In the February 26 issue Thorpe wrote a long article entitled "Reminiscences of Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" in which he did a character sketch of the real Tom Owen of East Feliciana. He wrote that he was indebted to the partiality of

his Southern friends for his first inducement to write and to the kindness of his reception by the *Spirit* for his continuance—a courteous, modest, and largely accurate account of his beginning.

By the spring of 1859 the editors noted that the paper was “constantly in receipt of evidence of a ‘thorough revival’ among the old friends of the ‘Spirit.’” By the end of volume twenty-nine, Jones and Thorpe announced that their subscription list had increased and that, amidst the excitement of the times, they were going to continue to exclude all political discussion that was in the least sectional:

By this course, the old “Spirit” has been for years the only truly conservative paper of the North, the favorite journal, through which good men, large-hearted men, the real cream of the country, have usually exchanged ideas, and held happy conversations. . . .

The revival which Jones and Thorpe were working for so vigorously was proceeding well enough, but the uneasy relations between the sections of the country were a particular threat to a journal circulating as extensively as the *Spirit* did in the South and West.

Under the editorial policy of Thorpe and Jones, the *Spirit* continued its interest in the Southwest and the Far West as the areas productive of the materials of a great national literature. In a review of Randolph B. Marcy’s *The Prairie Traveller* the editors observed that the “most original literature of the day is that which relates to the comparatively unwritten about ‘Far West,’ including the adventures of our soldiers, hunters, trappers, and Indians.”⁴ *The Prairie Traveller*, like Beckworth’s autobiography which Thorpe had reviewed for *Harper’s*, showed that the West was no longer Texas, Arkansas, and the lands immediately beyond the Mississippi, as it had been when Thorpe went to Louisiana to live, but now extended all the way to the Pacific.

The most serious attempt to analyze the new American

⁴ *Ibid.*, XXIX (November 12, 1859), 473.

character which the *Spirit* ever printed appeared anonymously in two parts in May and June, 1860. The essay opened by recalling the *Edinburgh Review's* question of forty years earlier, "Who reads an American book?" The author replied that he would no longer be willing to concede that the United States did not have a national literature. That such a literature had been slow in coming was an inevitable result of circumstances, for the new nation's first task was physical: it had a wilderness to subdue, economic necessities to provide, and a social structure to establish before it could turn its energies to broader intellectual activities. The first product of the new nation had been its system of government, the author recalled, and if it had produced nothing else, it need not have been ashamed of this one offering to the world's achievements.

The constant warfare of the frontier existence made necessary the militia musters, and in attendance at these were the politicians, the formers of local governments who developed the first and most prominent manifestation of the Western mind—the oral political address, the stump speech as it was called in the concrete frontier imagery. The orator was often of the people himself, and he always used their language. Because he had to appeal to the feelings of his audience, the manner of his speech was often more important to him than its intellectual content. By strict literary standards his language was ungrammatical and unrhetorical, bristling with odd phrases and border lingo, but it expressed the Western mind. It was singularly inventive of words and metaphors to express the new conditions of life and the new modes of thought, and it was characterized by an almost omnipresent humor. Thus through oratory the new frontier life received its first literary expression.

In attempting to account for the universality of humor on the frontier, the writer noted that it seemed paradoxically to arise from the difficult conditions of life in the border regions. More notable, humor always sat strangely

on the frontiersmen's sombre and even sorrowful manner. Whatever their circumstances, he added, "they will have, from time to time, a season of such utter heartfelt relaxation as sometimes to border on license," a restrained enough description of the wild humor and ritual drunkenness of the Western frontier. Both the Indian and the Negro, the writer observed, contributed elements to the frontier's peculiar humor. Both added some of their own terms to the border language, so that the Western character was something new, having felt the impact of various civilizations.

The essay concluded with a brief examination of "a few writers whose works embody most of the peculiar traits and oddities, fun, humor, and wit of the Southwestern United States." Thorpe, Hooper, and Longstreet were offered as the writers whose work recreated most accurately the thought, actions, and speech of Americans of the border regions. The frontier, the author felt, had produced and was producing the specifically American character and the specifically American language. And it was the authors of the humor of the Old Southwest who had captured or created the image of the Western American for literature. Surely Thorpe must have included with pleasure this sober appreciation of his attention to frontier language and character and of his contribution to American literature.

During the years Thorpe was part owner and editor of the *Spirit* it bore much other evidence of his personality. He wrote many essays on art for the paper: in the six-week period beginning April 20, 1859, he did a series of five essays on the National Academy of Design, commenting somewhat at random on the function of the organization and the work of the artists exhibited. His interest in writing about the South and West had always been accompanied by an interest in painting the region, and occasionally his criticism reflected his preoccupation. The rather cool realism and reserve of the genre painter Eastman Johnson appealed to Thorpe:

A long residence in the extreme Southwest, joined with the absolute excellence of E. Johnson's picture of "Negro Life in the South," No. 321, naturally caused us to stop before this painting, and the first agreeable impression we received has been confirmed by many subsequent examinations. We hold it to be very difficult to present negroes pleasantly on canvass; no phase of their life is really agreeable, but their simple hearty enjoyment, and its expression suggests a fellow feeling which, if it makes us not wonderous kind toward them, at least causes agreeable emotions, and calls forth our cordial sympathy. The figures are natural and naturally occupied. . . .

Johnson's picture had begun a little train of irrelevant personal meditation for Thorpe, hinting that his own ideas about Negroes in the South, under the heat and pressure of the time, were being examined.

In other papers of the series he praised Darley, the illustrator of his own first book, for his illustrations of Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Pioneers*. He lost no opportunity to praise his truly brilliant friend, Charles Loring Elliott.

In the papers on the National Academy of Design during the spring of 1860 Thorpe made some observations about the function of art in American society. He noted that most of the academicians seemed "to be disposed to cultivate what may be termed pleasing episodes rather than grand conceptions of artistic power," adding that this was the result of the demand for small pictures. The houses of the people of America, he continued, were not suited for large canvases, for the nation had no absolutely leisured class. But there was nothing wrong with this or anything thwarting for art in the fact: "Artists, if successful, are as a matter of course sensible, and they must paint what the multitude demand, and in so doing will reap a substantial reward, and reach their highest possible excellence. We all of us forget . . . that the now classic works of Greece were to the Athenians the popular expressions of everyday life. . . ." ⁵ Thorpe's

⁵ *Ibid.*, XXX (May 26, 1860), 181.

criticism reflects the reasonable observations of a practical man, always with much faith in the American experiment and what it could produce.

Yet at this very time Thorpe was engaged in producing one of the "grand conceptions" himself: a monumental 48- x 95-inch view of Niagara Falls. The spectacle was a favorite for American artists. Among others, John Trumbull and John Vanderlyn had both tried to offer accurate transcriptions of the scene. Later, as the romantic taste for stupendous and melodramatic spectacles developed, Frederick Church painted a view of the falls which had sold in 1857, said the June 3 *Leslie's*, for four thousand dollars. Alan Burroughs, however, offers Church's *Niagara Falls* as an example of how "coldly scientific" the man could be.⁶

Thorpe's picture was completed in 1860, after the Hudson River school had begun to popularize landscape painting in America. Thorpe's ambition was to reproduce the scene with careful accuracy of detail. *Niagara As It Is*, as he called it, was exhibited at H. W. Derby's, where the press was invited to see it before it was sent to England to be reproduced by chromo-lithography. The June 9 *Spirit* reprinted the reviews of the New York papers: they all showed much friendliness for Thorpe but only a reserved praise for his painting. The *Herald* called him an enthusiastic amateur, the *News* praised the picture as a transcript of minute fidelity, and the *Tribune* observed mildly that, viewed "strictly as a work of art, it might not stand the test of severe criticism." The papers were all aware that the picture was being sent to England to be engraved, for apparently Thorpe's plan was to have it reproduced for sale as a commercial venture. Some six months later the New York papers reported it back from London.

The publicity Thorpe's picture received in the press made it a matter of current interest. The Japanese visitors, who came to the United States after Commodore Matthew G.

⁶ Burroughs, *Limners and Likenesses*, 150.

Perry's visits to Japan in 1853 and 1854, were in New York at the time, and expressed a desire to see the work. The picture was fitted with draperies and hung in the dining hall of the Metropolitan Hotel for a showing June 20. At about 8:00 o'clock eight or ten subordinates, followed later by superior officers, the imperial interpreters, and finally the three princes, came to view the immense work. Thorpe was presented to the princes and, at their request, described the falls for them through their interpreter, Namoura Gohajiro, who had been the third interpreter at Commodore Perry's visit. A staff artist present at the fashionable exhibition drew a sketch of the scene for *Harper's Weekly* of July 7. He presented Thorpe, solemn and portly, explaining his work to the berobed and attentive Japanese.

Another phase of Thorpe's interest in romantic scenery was recorded in a series of essays for the *Spirit* in 1860 entitled "A Search for the Picturesque." The concept of the picturesque had been defined by Uvedale Price as early as 1794; its attributes placed it neatly between Edmund Burke's Sublime and Beautiful. Among the qualities of the picturesque were variety, intricacy, freedom from constraint, and the possession of rough and sudden imperfections.⁷ The romantic delight in old ruins, quaint buildings, odd personalities, and unusual scenery was an expression of the taste for the picturesque.

Thorpe's series began in mid-August of 1860 when he wrote a letter to the senior editor, Edward Jones, explaining (for the readers) that he could not be with the paper for a while because he was ill:

My Dear Senior—My many, many days of ailing, as you are aware, culminated last week in the necessity of retiring, for a few days at least, from active life, and with a *painful* heartiness I at last consented to be an invalid. It is none of my business, nor does it accord with my taste, to imitate my friend N. P. Willis by making my bodily infirmities subjects of editorial

⁷ Oliver W. Larkin, *Art and Life in America* (New York, 1949), 135.

gossip; in fact, I shall never forgive the "Sage of Idlewild" for lacerating my feelings week after week with his symptoms, while all the while he was as hearty as a buck, and no more out of order than the earth's axis. Be that as it may, "I was off my feet," at home, and, like a fainting fish, turned upon my back. . . .

Although allusions to his own health are rare and always casual, Thorpe apparently had a fair share of illness all his life. However, the week following the announcement that he was confined to his house, "A Search for the Picturesque" appeared, dated Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania, August 7, 1860. After four essays had appeared, the *Spirit* carried another notice that Thorpe was still confined at home. Either the trip to Pennsylvania was an imaginary one, or, what is more likely, the essays were written from material collected on some earlier excursions.

The essays recorded the rambles of a painter in search of subjects in the hills and forests of Pennsylvania. All the pieces were familiar essays, casual in organization and heterogeneous in content. Thorpe recreated the most picturesque of the views, observed the quaint appearance and odd customs of the Dutch communities, and even recorded a visit to the railway workshops of Altoona. These called to mind the advantages of Republican institutions which inspire self-respect and pride: "here labor is honorable, and it is in its associations, honored." Thus along with the idea of the innate goodness of man and the ennobling power of nature Thorpe accepted the idea that proper social institutions would improve the condition of all men.

Another trip Thorpe had recorded earlier for the *Spirit* was a family excursion in the fall of 1859 to Canada. He visited Toronto and Montreal, where he attended the Church of Notre Dame and expressed admiration for the Catholic service. The return was by way of Burlington, Vermont, and Saratoga Springs. Thorpe reported his journey in a series of letters October 1 to November 12. The

northern lakes and mountains he described with a painter's eye, alert for unusual and picturesque combinations. The essays included some character vignettes: Scotch fiddlers, a runaway slave, English children, a robust old Frenchman, and a dreamy Normandy girl. The streets of Montreal reminded him of the streets of New Orleans.

The time for leisurely trips, however, was drawing to a close. The growing national conflict was soon to swallow up Thorpe's most promising venture as proprietor and editor. Porter, who traveled widely North and South and had friends everywhere, had never allowed anything to be printed in the *Spirit* which concerned itself in the slightest with political matters. As political stands came to be determined increasingly on a sectional basis, the paper's position became steadily more difficult. It circulated nationally, and although it was published in New York, it had a large number of subscribers in the South. But the paper's neutrality was not simply a matter of good business. It had long expressed Porter's affection for all parts of the country; Thorpe was equally cosmopolitan in his ties. While there were a good many things in both Northern and Southern society of which Thorpe did not approve, his criticisms had always been from within each society, hopefully seeking to correct shortcomings without breaking the existing forms. The senior editor, Edward Jones, was a passionate, even indiscriminate, defender of the South. The *Spirit* was doomed by the times.

In March, 1859, Thorpe wrote a biographical sketch of Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia. The essay recalled with pleasure that Stephens had been one of the great Whigs, had supported the necessity of internal improvements, but against party position had also supported the annexation of Texas. In 1855, Thorpe recorded with approval, Stephens had successfully fought the Know-Nothing Party (and indeed Stephens had fought the anti-Catholic movements of

Georgia and had opposed secession). Thorpe's comment implies that, if he ever had had any admiration for the Know-Nothings, by the spring of 1859 he was disabused. The essay did not praise North or South, merely Stephens. With painful conscientiousness the essay avoided controversy.

As the months advanced the *Spirit* continued to decry sectionalism, noting that it had become ecclesiastical as well as political. The *Spirit's* account of John Brown's raid was contributed by "Nicholas Spicer," a colonel in the Virginia Militia. When Edward Jones took a trip for his health in January, 1860, he went ostentatiously to Charleston, and the notice of his absence mentioned the fact (the tone of wounded hope is apparent) that he had done twenty-four years of hard work for the *Spirit*.

On February 25, 1860, the paper printed a letter giving an account of a lecture Thorpe had delivered at Jamaica, Long Island, to the Young Men's Literary Association on cotton and its cultivation. He had shown, his reporter wrote, the intimate connection between the North and the South and had encouraged "love for the Union." From the days of his verdant Whiggery, Thorpe had opposed secession and insisted on the necessity of maintaining the Union. He continued to the end to interpret and explain the South and to oppose radicalism in both sections. But there could be no doubt as to what his position would be if the final choice had to be made.

At the end of 1860 Richard Hays disposed of his interest in the paper to Jones and Thorpe, who announced that they would continue as joint owners and editors.

The editorial for the first number of Volume XXXI defended the balancing function of the *Spirit* in the crisis of the times and drew a moral for its readers. After the struggle for independence, the editors pointed out, the United States had been so absorbed in practical affairs that the people had no time for recreation. Especially in the North,

the "severest and most acquisitive, and most soukilling of Poor Richard's proverbs were the rules of life." The troubles of the time, the editorial concluded, arose from the absorption of the mass of the people in the pursuit of gain and their neglect of their intellectual self-governing responsibilities.

One month later Thorpe withdrew from the *Spirit*. Thorpe's note hints that the editors perhaps disagreed, but amiably enough:

I have this day sold to Edward E. Jones, Esq., my interest in the "*Spirit of the Times*," who will hereafter conduct it on his own account

THOMAS B. THORPE

New York, March 6, 1861.

Like Richard Hays, apparently, Thorpe saw that the fine old *Spirit of the Times* was to be destroyed in the tragic wrack of the country. The journal gave expression to a set of cultural ties within the vast country, and the spirit of the times demanded that the ties be broken. Thus closed Thorpe's most important proprietary and editorial venture.

In the same issue announcing Thorpe's departure from the paper, Jones made a plea to his readers to pay their past-due accounts, which amounted to over \$50,000. The times, too, offered an excuse for debts.

Shortly afterwards, Jones's Northern readers began to attack him as a Southern sympathizer.⁸ In the June 22 issue he announced that the suspension of mail communication with the South by the United States government forced him to cease publication for a time. He made another plea for the past-due accounts, saying that he was far in debt for the publication expenses of the paper and could not even arrange his affairs temporarily unless his subscribers paid something of what they owed him. With this number ended the original New York *Spirit of the Times*.

⁸ *Spirit*, XXXI (June 8, 1861), 273.

4

During his last few months with the *Spirit* and in the period following Thorpe continued to speak about the country. On January 20, 1862, he delivered a lecture at Dodsworth's Hall entitled "An Inside View of the Great Rebellion." The lecture, "though delivered without notes, and in a free colloquial style, fully answered the high expectations of his hearers," for while it contained valuable information, "it was interspersed with many amusing anecdotes, and told in a capital manner."⁹ Mayor James Harper introduced Thorpe, and if *Leslie's* is to be trusted, the affair counted among fashion's tributes to war. Before the Historical Society on February 4 Thorpe read a paper on "The History of Cotton," and then in mid-March the "Inside View of the Southern Questions" was offered at Hoboken.¹⁰

For the spring, 1862, National Academy of Design exhibitions Thorpe prepared two pictures: *Scene Near Llewellyn Park* (New Jersey) and *Washington Irving's Grave*, the latter perhaps a kind of tribute to the American writer Thorpe had so much admired during his late teens. Thorpe had been among the first officers of the newly organized Brooklyn Art Association, and at its exhibitions he showed *I'll Fight It Out on This Line, Palmetto Swamp—The Banks of the Mississippi, Red Snapper—The Game Fish of the Gulf of Mexico*, and *Country Wood*, again Southern subjects all.¹¹

Thorpe had little time for painting, however, during the early months of 1862, for as the country moved toward war, he was active raising volunteers in support of the Union effort. To his friends, no doubt, he continued to argue that the war party of the South was not the true South.

⁹ *Leslie's*, XIII (February 8, 1862), 183.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII (February 22 and March 22, 1862), 215, 295.

¹¹ The time of exhibition of the four is not clear. The titles are from undated blank forms and notes in the Thorpe papers of the New York Public Library. I have been unable to locate any of these paintings.

His brother Henry Sackville Thorpe, the latter's Louisiana-born wife, Elizabeth Hampton, and their children, also left Baton Rouge some time before the outbreak of the war. They moved to Mechanicsville, New York, where Thorpe's widowed mother went to live with them. It was in Mechanicsville that she died in October, 1862.

But by the time of his mother's death Thorpe himself was far away again in the South, taking his own part in a strange interlude.

War Years in New Orleans

EVEN AFTER THE FALL OF FORT SUMTER IN THE SPRING OF 1861, Thorpe continued to hope that good relations between the North and South would be restored. His *Harper's* article, November, 1861, "About the Fox and Fox-Hunters," was an appeal for sympathy with and understanding of the South. In describing his own first fox hunt near Jackson, Louisiana, he praised the sport, recalled the kindness and generosity of Southern planters and the charm of their wives and daughters. Most journals North and South were busy denouncing their enemies by the fall of 1861, but *Harper's* remained aloof, and Thorpe's sentiments were not out of place in its pages. However, hope for reconciliation faded as 1861 drew to a close, and Thorpe grew increasingly active in raising volunteers for the Union cause.

Then an unusual opportunity to return to Louisiana offered itself. The Union army and navy planned a joint "thrust into the vitals of the Confederacy," the capture of New Orleans, and the consequent opening of the Missis-

sippi. A fleet was gathered, commanded by Commodores David Glasgow Farragut and David Dixon Porter, to carry a large land force to attack the downriver forts and the great port city itself. The Union army elements were commanded by one of the war's stranger figures, Benjamin Franklin Butler. Butler, a Breckenridge proslavery Democrat of Lowell, Massachusetts, who had once tried to nominate Jefferson Davis for the Presidency of the United States, was a wonderfully sinuous creature. He had a vast and windy confidence in himself as both a military strategist and an administrator. In characterizing him, a friend of Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts wrote that as a lawyer, "Butler was feared both for the things he was able and the things he was willing to do." Such was the man destined to lead the Union army into Louisiana.

Thorpe, with the temporary rank of colonel, joined the expedition. Late in April, 1862 (little more than a month after Thorpe's last lecture in New York), New Orleans fell to Farragut, without any serious defense by the Confederate forces.

Butler set about regulating the passionate violence of the many-complexioned city with his own overbearing harshness. What was permitted and what prohibited he spelled out with precision and enforced with bayonets. Far from the main body of Union strength and surrounded by hostile forces, he took perhaps too close notice of the conduct of the citizens of New Orleans. For example, the women of the city continued to express their contempt for the Union army by drawing aside their skirts when soldiers passed. The less well-bred among them taunted and even spit at officers and flag. Such conduct, which a greater man would have borne patiently, infuriated Butler. To control the women, he issued his imaginatively feminine Order No. 28. This provided that, whenever any female by "word, gesture, or movement" should "insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States," she was thereafter to

"be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her vocation." Such exotic improvisation in the enforcement of order, and an even more reprehensible propensity to steal legally in the occupied city, led to his being nicknamed "Beast Butler" and various unprintable epithets. Yet in fairness to Butler it must be said that he controlled the explosive city under most difficult circumstances.

With some speed New Orleans was returned to the control of loyal Union men, many of whom still lived in the city. The administration of the city became a mixture of local citizens who were loyal to the Union, military men, and outsiders brought in for special tasks. Thorpe himself was shortly taking part in the city government. The Acting Collector of Customs under the city's military government nominated Thorpe late in May, 1862, for the position of temporary clerk. Thorpe's appointment was approved by the Secretary of the Treasury May 28, salary to be \$1,600 a year. Treasury Department records do not show Thorpe's removal or resignation, and it is possible that he did not serve at all in the position offered. Instead, he undertook another task.

June 4, 1862, Butler addressed a directive to Brigadier General George F. Shepley, Military Commandant of the city, and to the City Council of New Orleans. He pointed out that the town swarmed with starving poor. Further, noted Butler, the city streets were dirty and in poor condition. The city could be cleaned and the poor helped if these latter were put to work at useful tasks. Therefore, Butler ordered the council to employ these poor at the rate of fifty cents a day. For its part the Union army would issue from its commissary a day's rations for a soldier to each person employed.

General Shepley then asked Thorpe to represent the Union army in the management of the laborers and the distribution of the food. Years later Butler, in his autobiography, paid tribute to Thorpe by saying that his life's work

as author and artist had been far different from what he found himself called upon to do in New Orleans but that he had inaugurated the system which distributed food to thirty-one thousand destitute families. James Parton, Butler's biographer and apologist, said that no one could have done the work better than Thorpe, for he tore away shanties, filled up hollows, purged the canals, cleaned the streets, repaired the levee, "and kept the city in such perfect cleanliness as extorted praise from the bitterest foes of his country and his chief." The July 21 *New York Times*, in answer to the usual criticisms about helping former enemies, reported that Thorpe had organized the distribution of the food so that it was given only to the women of the families, thus preventing the men from selling their rations to buy rum.

Fifteen years earlier Thorpe, as editor of the *Daily National*, had complained that the New Orleans yellow fever epidemics were in some way connected with the city's lack of sanitary regulations. Now he himself had the responsibility of cleaning the city. As Butler's biographer and the *New York Times* noted, he did the job well. In the fall of 1864 the *New Orleans Picayune*, which, under Alva Morris Holbrook was considerably less than friendly to the federal authorities, wrote that there had been no yellow fever during the three years of military occupation. The editor thought this was a result of the city's being kept "strictly clean."¹

In addition to providing work for the unemployed, Butler organized another relief program for the gratuitous distribution of food to the families of Union recruits, the families of Confederate soldiers, widows and the "friendless destitute." The management of the program was under the control of a commission of relief presided over by Benjamin F. Flanders, Thorpe's old friend who had sold him his interest in the *Daily Tropic* years before. Flanders, New Hampshire-

¹ *New Orleans Picayune*, August 10, 1864.

born, a Dartmouth graduate, a high school principal as well as an editor and publisher, was an old Whig. He had been so outspoken a Union man that he had had to leave New Orleans early in 1862, but now the changing times gave him again a voice in affairs of the city.² Assisting Flanders was a four-member commission, representing the city districts. Thorpe was appointed one of the members.³

The fact that Thorpe represented one of the New Orleans city districts in Butler's second relief commission suggests that he was beginning to regard himself again as a citizen of Louisiana rather than simply a member of the military authority. No doubt, too, his habitual sympathy for reform began to impel him to help give shape to the South of the future, as he saw its old forms breaking up. However, the Confederacy was still strong and young. Its fate was far from settled.

In New Orleans Butler did not last long. On December 17, 1862, General Nathaniel P. Banks, another Democrat and three times governor of Massachusetts, arrived to relieve Butler of his command, much to the latter's surprise.⁴ Banks instituted a military rule as notable for its mildness as Butler's had been for its harshness. At first, under Banks's mildness, disorder grew in New Orleans. Thorpe, disturbed, wrote Butler to say that his departure was regretted even by some of his former opponents, "among respectable people," because it had "paralyzed business, destroyed hope, and set things to backwards generally." Thorpe praised the general for his thorough "Union practices." Of Butler's enthusiastic greeting in the North, Thorpe wrote, "I have watched your progress north with pleasure. Your reception was no more

² Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (4 vols., New York, 1939), II, 15.

³ *Private and Official Correspondence of General Benjamin F. Butler* (5 vols., Norwood, Mass., 1917), II, 162-63 (hereinafter cited as *Correspondence of General Butler*).

⁴ Jefferson Davis Bragg, *Louisiana in the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge, 1941), 136.

than I had expected.”⁵ Thus it would appear that, in the doubtful and still fluid circumstances of the North, Thorpe was watching to see who would capture the popular imagination as the military hero of the day.

In May and June, 1863, Thorpe traveled north to Norfolk and Washington (and probably New York). On his trip he sounded out the people he met on the acceptability of Butler as a presidential candidate.⁶ Back in New Orleans, August 25, he wrote Butler to say that the general's friends in New York and elsewhere were moving quietly to bring him out as a presidential candidate because the country needed a man of administrative ability and a will of his own, which Butler certainly had. Thorpe felt that the laboring classes and the mass of the people would support Butler, and, remembering Zachary Taylor, he called the general the “true hero of New Orleans.” The exchange of letters with Butler reveals again Thorpe's old attachment to strong and decisive leadership. Thorpe was apparently also once again attempting to help make a president. But he seems shortly to have decided that he had the wrong man in Butler.

2

Abraham Lincoln, meanwhile, in his slow, patient way brooded on the method of returning the former Confederate States to the Union. Finally, on December 8, 1863, with his message to Congress he issued a cautious proclamation which he called a Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. The plan provided, first, for the return of the control of each state to the loyal element by enfranchising certain citizens who would take an oath of allegiance to the United States government, and second, for the acceptance of newly reorganized state governments by the federal government

⁵ Thorpe to Benjamin F. Butler, New Orleans, January 24, 1863. *Correspondence of General Butler*, II, 589.

⁶ *Id. to id.*, August 25, 1863. *Ibid.*, III, 106-107.

after at least one-tenth of the voters of each state had established such a government. The President in his message to Congress reasoned that there might be other ways of reconstruction and that some points might be left to future developments. The intention of his proclamation was to provide a method, a mode, whereby the seceded states might re-establish themselves, when they wished, within the national authority. Far away in New Orleans Lincoln had his first opportunity to test and shape his tentative plan.

Even before Lincoln's proclamation an initial step had been taken under Butler's administration of New Orleans. Butler had called an election which resulted in the choice of Benjamin F. Flanders and Michael Hahn for congressmen from the first and second Louisiana districts, sections under Federal control. Hahn and Flanders had then traveled to Washington, where the House seated them after some delay.

Bavarian-born Michael Hahn had been brought by his parents to the United States as a baby. He had graduated from the New Orleans high school, the law department of the University of Louisiana, and then had become president of the New Orleans school board. An outspoken anti-slavery man, Hahn had managed to neglect swearing allegiance to the Confederacy when he renewed his oath as a notary public. A well-educated and thoughtful man, not a politician, Hahn represented one of the types to which the loyal Union citizens of Louisiana turned for leadership in this time of military, political, and social revolution.

Following Lincoln's proclamation, General Banks called for an election of a governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general, superintendent of education, and auditor, to be held the following February, 1864.

Some of the local citizens, as well as some outside reformers, felt that Louisiana also needed a new constitution if she were to lead the South in the return to the Union and in the construction of a new set of social and legal forms. Consequently, Banks called for an election of delegates to

be held the first Monday of the following April to revise the Louisiana Constitution of 1852. Banks, like Lincoln, was concerned over the social as well as the political problems of the revolution. The two watched with keenest interest the development of the new government in Louisiana.

Many New Orleans citizens, too, were pleased. Local reformers and many ordinary citizens of faint or no allegiance to the Confederacy realized that Lincoln's proclamation and Banks's call for an election would help them to achieve one of their fundamental goals: they wanted Louisiana out from under military government. These first steps toward a minimum state organization moved toward a return of control to local hands and to civil rather than military administration.

Michael Hahn, meanwhile, had returned from his stormy position at Washington. He advised that no more congressional representatives be sent to the capital until Louisiana was more thoroughly reconstructed. He was pleased with Lincoln's plan and himself ran for governor on a platform supporting emancipation but opposing political equality for the Negro.

Opposed to him were Thomas J. Durant and Flanders. Durant represented a more radical position than Hahn's. He was a local Republican leader, a friend of Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury. A tall, thin man with a cadaverous, saturnine face, Durant was president of the Free State Committee, an organization of local reformers which received money contributed by antislavery people of the North to organize a government in Louisiana which would abolish slavery.⁷ Hahn charged that Durant and Flanders both supported complete political equality for the Negroes. Granting political equality to Negroes, Hahn an-

⁷ See Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era* (Cambridge, 1929), 59, and *Debates in the Convention for the Revision and Amendment of the Constitution of the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1864), 537-38 (hereinafter cited as *Debates*).

nounced in his campaign, was moving too far and too rapidly.

Thorpe supported Hahn in his more moderate position. So, too, did most of those citizens qualified to vote in the election, and Michael Hahn was chosen governor. Thorpe was increasingly active in local politics. Early in March, 1864, when plans were made for Hahn's inauguration, Thorpe was a member of the Committee on Arrangements.⁸

The next step called for by those who felt the Confederacy could not last and that Louisiana should lead the South in the creation of new political forms was a reconsideration of the state's constitution. Antislavery and other revolutionary sentiments, after long suppression in Louisiana, now had opportunity for expression. Even before the choosing of new state officers, Banks had called for the election of delegates to a constitutional convention, and Governor Hahn, immediately upon assuming office, confirmed Banks's proclamation. Thus Hahn began to exercise the new civil authority; at the same time he expressed the new state organization's approval of the convention's task.⁹

Before the election to the convention was held, Lincoln, constantly preoccupied with the form which society in the South was to take, wrote Hahn a private letter containing his first important commitment on Negro suffrage:

Now you are about to have a convention, which among other things, will probably define the elective franchise. I barely suggest for your private consideration, whether some of the colored people may not be let in—as, for instance, the very intelligent, and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks.¹⁰

Thus through personal contact and by cautious statesmanship Lincoln sought to communicate his own vision of a

⁸ New Orleans *Picayune*, March 4, 1864.

⁹ John Rose Ficklen, *History of the Reconstruction in Louisiana* (Baltimore, 1910), 67.

¹⁰ Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, III, 12.

reborn society freed of Negro slavery and providing the beginning of a place for the new freedman.

Thorpe, who had now been almost two years in New Orleans, offered himself to the voters of the Second District of the city as a Free State candidate to the Constitutional Convention. The Free State candidates opposed slavery. Thorpe was elected. When the convention met on April 6, 1864, at Liberty Hall in New Orleans, Thorpe announced that he had been requested to call the assembly to order—by whom he did not say. The request hints, however, that Thorpe's old Whig-Union sympathies and his moderate liberalism made him a man trusted by Governor Hahn and General Banks.

On the second day of debates P. K. O'Conner of the Second District nominated Thorpe for president of the convention, but Thorpe had no real support. Instead, Judge Edward H. Durell of the United States court was finally chosen for the chair.

The makeup of the convention was limited in many ways, but it did give voice to opinions long suppressed in the South. Nineteen of Louisiana's forty-eight parishes were represented: Ascension, Assumption, Avoyelles, East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Concordia, East Feliciana, Iberville, Jefferson, Lafourche, Madison, Orleans, Plaquemines, Rapides, St. Bernard, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary, and Terrebonne.

Voters for the delegates to the convention had to take Lincoln's oath of allegiance to the Constitution; consequently, the delegates elected were distinguished generally for their antisecessionist beliefs. Some were citizens loyal to the Union, men who had suffered personal persecution under the Confederacy. Young Thomas Madison Wells, a member of one of the great slaveholding families of Rapides Parish, in his speech supporting emancipation said that he had been driven from his home, had himself been a slave

"from the oppression and tyranny of that bastard government, led by that demon of the nineteenth century. I have been, sir, a penniless refugee, driven from my home by the satellites of John Slidell, and have recorded an oath in high heaven against giving aid or countenance towards any man or means that will tend to promote the interests of his followers." ¹¹ Robert W. Taliaferro of Concordia Parish, in one of his rare speeches, declared he had never been in a free state in his life but that he had two brothers fighting under the Union flag and intended "to fight under it myself before long." ¹² Loyalty to the old Union and anti-slavery sentiments were strong.

The city was heavily represented as against the country: Orleans Parish accounted for over 60 of the 95 delegates returned. Points of view from extreme conservatism to radicalism were represented. J. R. Terry of the Third District, Orleans, said on the second day of debate that he had heard it charged that one-half of the members of the convention were Copperheads, that is, Confederate sympathizers, a charge repeated on the floor, with varying statistics, in the days that followed. R. King Cutler, a New Orleans judge, declared that he, Judge R. K. Howell of the Third District Court, and other members of the convention had been "compelled" to take the oath of allegiance to the Confederate States.¹³ The convention was certainly no assembly of carpet-baggers. Only Thorpe and Alfred C. Hills were charged with being no true Louisianians.¹⁴

From the opening of the convention many of the delegates reasoned that they could not merely return Louisiana to her old status but must move with the times. Judge Durell, in his opening address as president of the convention, ex-

¹¹ *Debates*, 245.

¹² *Ibid.*, 218.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 518.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 195, 550.

pressed his opinion that the secession movement was a minority movement but that the undoing of its work could be a great social revolution:

On the 26th day of January, 1861, a few ambitious and bad men had assembled in convention, and representing a minority of the people of the State, declared "the connection between the State of Louisiana and the Federal Union dissolved"; you, gentlemen, have been chosen—the elect of the loyal people of Louisiana—to undo that work of folly and crime. . . .

Gentlemen—you are all familiar with the rise and progress of the grand drama which is being enacted in these days upon this continent, and of which we also are a part. With this knowledge, you will accept the progress of ideas; you will accept the changes which great convulsions in the opinions and in the societies of men make a necessity; you will willingly exchange a dead past for a living future.¹⁵

Many of the members expressed with some passion their belief that they were engaged in one of the most significant tasks of the war, that they were to lead the way for the Southern states to return to the old Union, and that out of the agony and ruin of battle would arise a new nation, one more truly democratic, destined to lead the peoples of the world to new visions of freedom and justice for all mankind. On the second day of debates Judge A. Cazabat of Rapides declared, "Sir, the eyes of the civilized world are upon us. This is a struggle between freedom and slavery, involving the salvation or ruin of this country."

Thorpe counted among the active members of the convention. He declared his stand and his reasons on all the important issues before the convention, although he did not speak as frequently as some of the other delegates. His position was generally that of moderate liberalism, far from radical even for the time, but frequently slightly more liberal than the average sentiment of the convention—if such a sentiment may be postulated. Quite consistently Thorpe's

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

advocation of moderate reform repeated the pattern of ideas expressed in his novel, *The Master's House*.

Thorpe spoke often enough in support of Lincoln's policies to make it apparent that he approved of the direction that the President's reconstruction plan was taking. He was aware, perhaps from his own observation, perhaps through contact with Banks or Hahn, of the significance of the convention. In a speech in support of education for Negroes he summarized the assembly's relation to the Federal government and its importance:

We are legislating not only for Louisiana, but all the States; and I wish you to understand this fact: that the president of the United States, and Gen. Banks, and certain parties who sympathize with the rebellious States, have towards us a kindly feeling, and have been mainly instrumental in getting up and ordering this Convention, which is to bring back Louisiana under civil instead of military power. If we fail to come up to their expectations, and the expectation of the North, what will be the result? I tell you this is the last time the protection of the United States will be held out to any rebellious State in this nation. [Hear, hear.] If we fail, nothing hereafter will settle our status but the sword. . . .¹⁶

Thorpe's declaration that Northern moderates and sympathizers with the South hoped the convention would provide the Northern radicals with no cudgels for a reconstruction of violence was perceptive and frank. However, its manner, particularly the reference to the "expectations of the North," touched sectional sensibilities. Some of the delegates took it as a threat, and the reference aroused a few to violent denunciation.

Because of Thorpe's mention of interests outside the South, Edmund Abell in reply accused Thorpe of being the agent of the Federal government, of antislavery interests, or of some vague forces which Abell assumed were inimical to the people of Louisiana:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

He [Thorpe] ought not to be passed [i.e., overlooked] here. I shall not do it. I have passed him because I have found him one of the most honest, candid men on this floor. He told you on the second or third day, and was the only gentleman who told you, that we were assembled here for a certain purpose, and that purpose ought to be accomplished quickly. I would say to him, and all who believe as he does, as did Paul when speaking on the subject of slavery—in his bold and powerful language he said, "Servants, obey your masters." I came here for no other purpose than to forward the interests of the people of Louisiana. I came here as their servant, and intend to obey them as long as I stand upon this floor. I advise the gentleman to pursue the same course and obey his master.¹⁷

Thorpe had pointed out that what the convention did was of concern to the people of the North as well as to those of the South; that is, there was a national as well as a sectional interest to be considered. Abell professed to interpret, consequently, that Thorpe represented the North. Both Thorpe and Abell could quote from the swirling and passionate opinions of their constituents whatever they needed to support their positions. Both chose to call their constituents "the people."

When the actual work of the convention began, President Durell appointed seventeen standing committees. He appointed Thorpe to the Legislative Department Committee and to the chair of the Enrollment Committee. On less important special committees Thorpe served on the group to examine an assault on one of the members and was chairman of the Committee on Federal Relations, which early reported simply that the Constitution of the United States was the "supreme law of the land," a principle not universally acceptable to the convention. Finally, near the end of the convention's work, Thorpe served on a special committee to arrange the articles and correct the language of the new constitution.

The first and thorniest question that the convention took

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

up was a declaration abolishing slavery. On April 13 Edmund Abell of the Fifth Orleans District, most vocal of the defenders of slavery, introduced a resolution in the convention to denounce as unconstitutional General Banks's Order No. 38, establishing schools and supplying teachers for the education of freedmen. Thorpe stood with the seventy-two members voting to table the resolution.

Then Judge Howell offered a resolution to appoint a committee to whom the question of the immediate and permanent abolition of slavery would be referred. Abell offered as a substitute the resolution that "no proposition for the abolition of slavery be entertained by this Convention, until ways and means are first provided for a full, fair, and equitable compensation of all loyal owners." This, too, was tabled, coming as it did even before the appointment of the standing committees.

On April 27 Dr. M. F. Bonzano of the Sixth Orleans District, chairman of the Committee on Emancipation, reported an ordinance which would (1) abolish slavery, (2) abolish all right of property in man, (3) abolish the Black Code, (4) provide that no penal laws "be made against persons of African descent, different from those enacted against white persons," and, finally, (5) provide that the legislature should at its first session "enact laws providing for the indenture of minors of African descent, as apprentices, to citizens of the State, on the same terms and conditions as those prescribed . . . for the apprenticing of white minors."

Edmund Abell, as a member of the committee, at once rose to offer a minority report. He defended slavery on constitutional grounds, on the grounds that it was for the best interests of white laboring men and best for the Negroes themselves. Emancipation ought, therefore, he argued, to be indefinitely postponed, at least until the federal and state legislatures should provide both for the compensation of the owners and for the removal of all slaves from the state.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

Both reports were made the order of the day for Wednesday of the following week.

When the question of education for the Negroes came up, Thorpe spoke in favor of it. Abell, rising in reply, insisted that slavery was not abolished. Legally he was correct, for Abraham Lincoln had specifically excepted in his Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863, those Louisiana parishes under Union control. Assuming that slavery was to continue, Abell asked, "How do we know that the master would permit the slave to go to the schools if we establish them?"¹⁹ Although Abell was legally correct, many members of the convention were already beginning to take the position that, practically, slavery was dead and that shortly their own work would put the legal quietus on the troublesome problem.

When the report of the Committee on Emancipation did come up, Thorpe moved that the convention proceed to consider it until it was finally disposed.²⁰ Abell then read his minority report and brought up the problem of compensation to the owners for the freed slaves. Abell argued in support of slavery that the Negroes were "and they will ever be the most dependent creature on earth." With a different approach, he later argued that the Negroes, if freed, would be led by factions of desperate men to "imbrue their hands in the blood of the white race."²¹ Abell's sentiments were shared by a substantial minority of the convention. His stand had at least the appearance of a reasonable position. While the development of events has invalidated a large number of both his public fears and his generalizations, still, he was sincere and honest in offering them.

Another less admirable attitude found open expression at the convention, an attitude which even today the moralists try to reform and the politicians to cover: that was, a pas-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

sionate hatred of Negroes. William Tompkins Stocker, meditating publicly on the coming society of Louisiana, implied that each man's moral choice was a simple dichotomy: "my sympathies are with the white man and not with the negro. My hand is against the African, and I am for pushing him off the soil of this country." ²² Later Stocker added "I have no friendship for the negro. I am against him and will be against him, and wherever my voice can be raised to put down a negro I will do it." Stocker's attitude was not unusual. His and similar feelings found expression in a variety of legal proposals. Force of arms would decide the question of state or national supremacy; it was the problem of the new social patterns that offered politicians and leaders of men their thorniest difficulties.

Abell was answered by Terry and Hills, the latter with wit and much oratorical extravagance: "The gentleman has attempted to justify slavery from the example of the Egyptians," Hills observed. "I admire him for it. It is most fitting and proper that the man who stands up in this day and age to justify such a system, should go back to the Egyptians, whose religious altars smoked with human sacrifices, and whose idols were the most gross and obscene of all the Pagan nations." Neither Abell nor Hills burdened himself with a vulgar or pedantic accuracy. And in answer to Abell's Biblical quotations, Hills observed, "It is not the first time that men have stolen the livery of heaven to serve the devil in." For his own reply he quoted the golden rule and Paul, "who tells us that God 'hath made of one blood all the nations of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth.' " ²³

For the question of compensation, it was Charles Smith, delegate from the parish of St. Mary, who offered the simplest argument: war, he felt, had made compensation impossible by involving too many interests. Of secessionist slaveholders, he asked, "Can these men compensate the

²² *Ibid.*, 181.

²³ *Ibid.*, 171-72, 179. Hills's quotation is from Acts 17:26.

country for the evils they have inflicted upon it? Can they bring back the lives lost upon the battle fields?"²⁴ Thorpe followed the same line of reasoning by pointing out the impossibility of fixing blame or assessing the damages of war. In his reply to Abell he observed in part:

If we undertake to pay for losses, let me ask him are those to be paid who have suffered from destruction of their fences, the scores of notes due, which can never be collected, and the burning down of their houses? We shall find, if we undertake this compensation, that it involves us in a mass of injustice, an inextricable confusion that we shall never see the end of.²⁵

At one time the compensation of slaveholders might have been of great use to the nation, but the time was now past, Thorpe felt. Then, with some political skill, Thorpe added that when he looked around the convention, he saw "many gentlemen here who were born and bred large slaveholders." He added, "I am willing to go to them, to learn whether I am to vote on the question for or against compensation of slaveowners." Indeed, young Wells and Taliaferro, scions of perhaps the greatest slaveholding families of Louisiana represented at the Convention, both served on the five-man Committee on Compensation of Loyal Owners for Slaves Emancipated. Both signed its report calling for immediate emancipation and referring the matter of compensation to the Congress of the United States.²⁶

On the question of allowing Negroes to vote, Thorpe supported a limited extension of the franchise. Limited extension, it will be recalled, was Lincoln's suggestion by private letter to Governor Hahn. When the third article of the Emancipation Committee's report was read, providing the abolition of the Black Code, Abell proposed an amendment: "Provided, always that the Legislature shall never pass any act authorizing free negroes to vote or to immigrate

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.

into this State, under any pretense whatever.”²⁷ Thorpe opposed the immigration clause as an “inhuman proposition,” adding, “Let us pass the emancipation clause of the section; say, if you please, the negro shall not vote; but, for God’s sake, gentlemen, let it stop there.”²⁸ Thorpe, obviously uneasy at the depth and passion of fear of or hatred for the Negro, was willing to trade the vote for immediate emancipation, but still he supported a limited extension of the franchise. The question was finally compromised by restricting suffrage to white males but giving the legislature the power in the future to extend the right to vote “to such persons, citizens of the United States, as by military service, by taxation to support the government, or by intellectual fitness, may be deemed entitled thereto.”²⁹

The resolution is close in its wording to Lincoln’s proposal in his letter to Governor Hahn. Its passage was in fact a defeat for the supporters of an extension of the franchise to Negroes. But it represented an expression of intent to move toward such an extension. Thorpe eventually consented to support the resolution. It passed by a vote of 48 to 32.

Thorpe vigorously opposed Abell’s amendment to exclude Negroes from voting and from immigrating into the state. In his speech Thorpe revealed that he had some understanding of Louisiana’s unique society. He saw that laws such as Abell proposed would not merely affect the newly freed slaves but would work injustices on the ancient free Negro population of Louisiana:

Go into the country parishes and examine into the intricate and delicate relations that generations of slavery have created there, to say nothing of the social life of this city—you who talk so glibly, or amuse yourselves in the treatment of this solemn question—and see how deep and wide would strike the operations of your proposed constitutional provision. . . . Let us

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 450.

therefore come up nobly, but considerately, to the work, and humanely, dispassionately, and in a Christian manner, provide for the important interests of the future.

There are among the populations of Louisiana many of mixed blood, who are good citizens and who were once large proprietors. . . . I know myself of one neighborhood, where for miles along the Mississippi coast are nothing but rich sugar plantations, owned by this mixed race, colored, or negroes, if you please. In that section of country, Rapides, which is represented on this floor with so much honor by Mr. Wells, there are rich neighborhoods of negro plantation owners. . . . But now, gentlemen, these men, these late slaveholders, who have been good citizens, or have any possible claim upon the State and the people, are struck down by the proposed amendment and placed in an infinitely worse position than they were under any of the antecedent pro-slavery constitutions of this state.³⁰

Thorpe's was the only voice raised to call attention to the wrong that resolutions like Abell's would inflict on Louisiana's old free colored population. His "to say nothing of the social life of this city" was the only even vague reference that might call attention to the plight of the mixed families living in the little houses on the Street of Good Children in New Orleans. Some of the Negroes of the state had been free since the time of the French domination. They had enjoyed certain legal rights and even a certain social status in New Orleans³¹ where their complex culture flourished, compounded of elements French, Spanish, American English, and African. Aside from moral considerations, here,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 215-16.

³¹ The district in New Orleans where the colored mistresses of white men have kept their homes and children, and the institution of the Quadroon Balls have been widely publicized. Less well known is the fact that when James H. Caldwell opened his Camp Street theater in 1824 he knew that there were so many prosperous free Negroes in New Orleans that "the welfare of the theater would depend to some extent upon their patronage" and so set aside boxes and seats for them, and one night a week was reserved by "tacit agreement" for the quadroon women and their escorts, usually white. John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (Baton Rouge, 1952), 38-39.

indeed, was a cultural resource of education and some experience with freedom which might possibly have been utilized to make a unique contribution from Louisiana to the problem of reconstruction. Apparently only Thorpe in the convention saw the possibility or dared to support it publicly.

The problem of who were colored and who were not added its complexity to the deliberations. There was much opposition to the education of Negroes in the convention. Late in its work J. Randall Terry offered an article providing that the property of white persons be taxed for the support of white schools and the property of colored persons be taxed to support colored schools.³² Charles Smith, who opposed the article, then offered a resolution observing that to reach the basis of taxation "it becomes necessary in order to avoid difficulty in the future, that it should also define what degree of blood constitutes a colored person."³³ John Henderson added that if the convention would not face up to the question he would ask General Banks to settle it. The problem, Henderson knew, was in New Orleans particularly a mixed one indeed; and any military investigation into family backgrounds was quite inconceivable, as he also knew. Henderson's political cynicism, however, made its point: which children should be educated was not finally decided until the end of the convention, when a provision was made simply that all children should be educated. This Thorpe supported. It passed 50 to 29.

In the whole question of the position of the freedman and the relations of the races, Thorpe took a position of liberal moderation. He insisted on immediate emancipation, for to him slavery was the great evil, the true sore in Southern society. To achieve emancipation he would have sacrificed the right of the Negro to vote. He did not, he said, support equality of the races: "I do not ask for negro equality."

³² *Debates*, 522.

³³ *Ibid.*, 547

At the same time he consistently opposed the many harsh and punitive measures that were offered with some strange frequency, measures expressing hatred or fury thus early turned on the Negro who was still largely a passive factor in the conflict, at least in the South. Once, discussing an offered amendment to forbid freed Negroes ever to immigrate into the state, Thorpe asked, "What kind of a free State constitution is this that you would pass, when you blacken it by a provision most disgraceful to Christianity as well as to all just and equitable laws?"³⁴ During the course the convention sat, Thorpe regularly opposed, on both legal and moral grounds, the inequitable and oppressive measures as they were constantly offered, as did the majority of the delegates. A truly kindly person, he felt that sympathy for the down-trodden and the oppressed was right and appropriate for a Christian gentleman.

Thorpe's references to Christianity and to religion are frequent in his speeches at the convention and frequent compared to the number of references in his early writing and talks. During these years his son, Thomas May Thorpe, was attending the General Theological Seminary, where he graduated, and, on July 1, 1866, was ordained deacon in the Episcopal Church by Bishop Horatio Potter of New York. Throughout his life Thomas May Thorpe remained a minister in the Episcopal Church. Thorpe himself became a communicant of the Episcopal Church, perhaps sometime during these years, and remained within the church during the rest of his life.

Thorpe's political conservatism in some areas showed not only in his cautious approach to the Negro vote but also in his view that judicial offices ought not to be elective. When a resolution was offered to make the Louisiana judiciary elective, Thorpe rose again (reluctantly, he said) for "were it not for my horror of an elective judiciary, I might not have

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

made any remarks on this subject.”³⁵ Judges, Thorpe felt, should not be politicians and should be kept apart from political influences. Thorpe, obviously recalling his own years in the backwoods of Louisiana, said that particularly in the back country justice and equity would be abused if the judiciary were elective: “Twenty years ago it was a common remark, ‘that if a man could get Ed. White as a lawyer, and a Lafourche jury, he could carry anything’; and in many of the country parishes there were persons who, by their personal influence with their numerous relatives and their great wealth, boasted that they feared nothing from the courts.”³⁶ The injustice and favoritism of country courts, Thorpe saw, were the same stuff as the injustice and favoritism of city courts. Thorpe’s faith in the wisdom and virtue of the people was a tempered and realistic faith.

However, to label some of Thorpe’s votes at the convention *liberal* and others *conservative* is not always helpful; what he stood for at each question is the important thing. Indeed, *conservative*, *liberal*, *radical*, *fanatic*, and the like are not very meaningful for the time, which in its agonies of hatreds and loves, devotions and oppositions, offered even less pattern than the tangled affairs of men usually do. In all, however, Thorpe’s definition of “people” included the Negroes, and his acts were refreshingly free of hatreds and rancor and motivated with a consistent kindness toward all men.

To some degree Thorpe may have found the work of the convention a painful and wearying business, in spite of his love for political activity. In a private letter to Gordon L. Ford of New York, written June 14 when the convention was in the midst of its deliberations, he expressed his pleasure at receiving Ford’s note, “which recalls to my mind Brooklyn life and Brooklyn associations [two words illegible]

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

more than ever pleasantly in contrast with the whole life and associations and rather tropical heat of this Southern Louisiana." ³⁷ The reference to the contrast in life and associations North and South is vague enough but expresses nostalgia and hints perhaps at some wearying of the spirit.

In spite of what a few later commentators and historians have said, the constitution that the convention produced was a reasonable piece of work—not so revolutionary that it would be unacceptable to local conservatives, except for the intransigent, and not so conservative but that reformers, except for the radical, could feel that real gains toward a better society had been made. In its totality it was much like Louisiana's constitution of 1852, except that it renounced secession, emancipated the slaves, provided for the education of all children, including the colored, and expressed a sentiment in favor of the freedmen's being given the vote at a future time.

The fact that at least a few of the Negroes were not enfranchised was a disappointment to the old free and educated colored population of New Orleans. On July 23 through their newspaper, the tri-weekly French and English *Tribune*, they expressed the mild hope that the convention would "reconsider some of its acts." These colored people, some of them of families free for generations in New Orleans, found themselves in the peculiar position of losing rather than gaining in the upheavals of the times. Some had, here and there in the South, once been accorded various privileges, among them even the right to vote. As the South moved toward secession (or as the votes became effective, the September 8 *Tribune* observed), the right to vote was almost universally withdrawn. Now it appeared to the free colored people of New Orleans that the right was not to be restored even under the new regime.

³⁷ The original is in the New York Public Library, as are other letters to Ford.

President Lincoln expressed his general satisfaction with Louisiana's new constitution, although he, too, would have preferred extension of the franchise to a few of the Negroes. Writing to General S. A. Hurlbut, successor to Banks, he called the work "an excellent new constitution—better for the poor black man than we have in Illinois."³⁸ Finally, at the cabinet meeting on the day of his death, Lincoln again said that he was sorry that the suffrage had not been given to a few of the Negroes in Louisiana but that in the main her constitution was a good one.³⁹

The convention adjourned July 25, 1864, after approving two rather unusual resolutions. The first resolved that "such officers and employes of the Convention as may be necessary for the completion of its work shall, after adjournment, be under the direction of the chairman of the Committee on Enrollment [i.e., T. B. Thorpe] and the president of the Convention . . . [i.e., E. H. Durell]." Thus Thorpe and Durell were appointed to the business of "winding up and perfecting the work of the Convention. . . ." ⁴⁰

The second resolution provided that the convention could be reconvened, first, at the call of the president if the constitution were rejected by the voters, or second, by the state legislature in case "of any emergency requiring its action," such as making amendments or additions and the like.⁴¹ Both resolutions were ill-starred.

The new constitution was submitted September 5, 1864, to the popular vote within the Federal lines and approved 6836 to 1566.⁴² According to the *Picayune*, September 21, it had a majority in every parish voting except Point Coupee, Plaquemines, St. James, and Terrebonne.

At the same election representatives to the General

³⁸ Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, IV, 69.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 264.

⁴⁰ *Debates*, 622.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 623.

⁴² Ficklen, *History of Reconstruction in Louisiana*, 81.

Assembly under the new constitution were chosen. Again Thorpe ran to represent the Second Orleans District. He had been active as a Republican in New Orleans, and because of his party as well as because of his liberal attitude toward the Negroes, he received no support from the Democratic *Picayune*. He did, however, receive the support of the *German Gazette*, no doubt a result of his work for his German and French constituency. The New Orleans *Tribune*, speaking for the city's colored population, added its mild approval: "Col. Thorpe contributed immensely in redeeming this state from the thralldom of rebellion, and we think him worthy of the proffered honor."⁴³ The *Tribune's* support was a mere expression of sentiment, however, for its colored readers did not vote.

Over seventeen candidates ran for the five seats allotted the Second Orleans District. Thorpe failed to gain a seat, placing ninth in the rather large group.⁴⁴ Again Thorpe had run unsuccessfully for an elective office.

For a while he remained active in New Orleans politics. A few weeks after his defeat he met with the local Republican group to confirm the nominations of Lincoln and Johnson by the party, and was elected one of the many vice-presidents.⁴⁵ But he apparently felt that he himself had no more to hope for in New Orleans. When the U. S. Mail Steamship *Evening Star* sailed for New York on October 29, Colonel Thorpe was among her passengers.⁴⁶ He never returned to the South.

3

While the constitution that the convention produced was a reasonable one, its conduct while it sat was open to

⁴³ New Orleans *Tribune*, September 9, 1864.

⁴⁴ New Orleans *Picayune*, September 7, 1864.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, October 16, 1864.

⁴⁶ New Orleans *Tribune*, October 29, 1864.

objection. The times were uneasy. While the delegates sat, General Banks's Red River expedition of 40,000 men suffered a disastrous mauling by Confederate forces. During his raid up the Red River, Banks was unable to get the fleet above Grand Ecore, near Natchitoches. He decided to march overland toward Shreveport, but was beaten by General Richard Taylor at Sabine Crossroads, some forty miles south of Shreveport. The night of April 9 Banks withdrew into good positions near Pleasant Hill, where Taylor again attacked him. This time, however, the Confederate right flank was turned, and Taylor retreated toward Shreveport while Banks withdrew to the Red River.

Thus early in its session the convention was made aware that its position was precarious. It is not easy to exercise every wisdom of conduct and action while violence menaces. Perhaps as a result of its uneasiness the body took notice of its treatment in the unfriendly press that it might have ignored. It concerned itself unduly with its own salaries under the new government. It debated the organization and pay of the corrupt and miserable New Orleans police. It discussed its own ten dollar per diem at unseemly length. Worst of all, it provided lavish contingent expenses for itself. The \$100,000 it had appropriated for its costs had, as a result, to be supplemented by another \$20,000 before it adjourned. Its contingent expenses included large sums spent for brandy, cigars, and newspapers at a time when the poor state of Louisiana was divided between large Federal and Confederate armies, and native and imported bands of jayhawkers roamed the border regions at night, to murder and plunder in the names of miscellaneous philosophies. The times demanded a decent economy, which the convention did not exercise.

Over three months after the convention adjourned, the legislature of the new Louisiana state government passed a resolution appointing a committee to learn if any of the

members of the Constitutional Convention were continuing to draw their per diem since the adjournment, or if any of the members had drawn money from the state treasury for other services.⁴⁷

The committee returned its report indicating that some members had received more than they were legally entitled to in per diem. It also reported that between August 2 and September 24, E. H. Durell, J. W. Thomas, T. B. Thorpe, J. T. Barrett, J. Buckley, Jr., J. P. Montamat, and F. M. Crozat had continued to draw pay for services. The committee further reported that it had addressed letters to each of the members asking that they all return the money to the state treasury.

In defense of Durell, Thorpe, and the others it may be observed that they were drawing their pay under a resolution of the convention for services they were rendering. But in truth, the resolution itself was open to question.

In other ways, too, the convention's conduct had been scandalous. Not only had it been extravagant in providing itself with whiskey, brandy, champagne, and cigars, but worse, the investigating committee discovered that the records of expenditures for these contingent expenses had been suspiciously careless. Comparison of the records of the New Orleans merchants who cooperated with the committee (several businessmen refused to open their books) revealed that Sergeant-at-arms M. DeCoursey was regularly in the habit of charging the treasury with more than he actually paid for purchases, apparently pocketing or distributing the difference. The total amount of vouchers receipted for was \$28,261.52, while the warrants drawn for expenditures totaled \$38,845.26.⁴⁸ Such large-scale embezzlement could certainly not have been carried on without the knowledge of at least some of the convention delegates.

Thus the venality of some of the members of the con-

⁴⁷ New Orleans *Picayune*, November 4, 1864.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, December 21, 1864.

vention helped to cast suspicion on the constitution they had produced, a constitution which was an admirable effort deserving every support of its framers. Opponents of the new constitution were quick, of course, to fasten on the faults of the convention in order to discredit the convention's work. It would be unrealistic to suppose that the convention had found a solution to the vast difficulties facing the South, for mankind's real problems are not "solved" in any simple sense of the word. But had the convention conducted itself with sobriety, frugality, and strictest rectitude, its weight for good would have been greater at this particularly crucial point in the eternal struggle.

The Special Committee on the Constitutional Convention addressed a letter to each recipient of money, requesting him to refund the amounts to the state treasury. Its report added, "Colonel T. B. Thorpe was not notified, not being in the city."⁴⁹ Some six weeks earlier, a week before the Special Committee was even appointed to begin its investigation, Thorpe had sailed for New York.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, December 10, 1864.

*A Trip
on the "Evening Star"
and Other Journeys*

THE U. S. MAIL STEAMSHIP "EVENING STAR," WITH Thorpe aboard, sailed first to Havana, destination of a portion of the passengers. On the way into the harbor Commander Bell pointed out to Thorpe and other of his passengers the smoke of a Confederate blockade runner, black against the October sunset. On the wharf, under the red and gold slashed flag of Spain, were bales of Confederate cotton; signs of the war were everywhere.¹

The following morning Thorpe went ashore to stroll through the old city. He visited the *Plaza de Toros*, and in the evening, portly and dignified, he stood to watch the *Paseo*, pleased with the beauty of the Cuban women. He saw in the city as in the harbor a need for tidying up. The whole island hinted undeveloped wealth, and everywhere he saw suggestions for "improvement and the accumula-

¹ T. B. Thorpe, "Something About Cuba," *Appleton's Journal*, I (August 14, 1869), 616.

tion of wealth." ² His old passion for expansion of the United States burned anew, unsubdued by the great war he was leaving.

On from Havana the "Evening Star" sailed to New York. Once back in the city, Thorpe seems to have given his time almost wholly to his painting for a while. By the spring of 1865 he had a landscape ready for the National Academy of Design exhibition. Rather curiously, he did not give his address, as the custom was when showing a picture. But by the 1867 exhibition he was living once more at his home at 87 Pineapple Street, Brooklyn. This time once again his picture was of the South: *Palmetto Swamp and Scarlet Ibis—Louisiana*.

Then in the fall of 1868 Thorpe's friend Charles Loring Elliott died. Thorpe wrote a long obituary for the *Evening Post*, praising his friend's genius and recalling the early days of their training together with John Quidor. Later the essay was reset and published as a pamphlet of eleven double-column pages entitled *Reminiscences of C. L. Elliott*. The friendship of the two, Thorpe wrote in his tribute, had "lasted uninterrupted and shadowless for nearly forty years."

2

In addition to such incidental work for newspapers, Thorpe began again in the late 1860's to write for the national magazines. His "Duels and Duelists" for the August, 1868, *Harper's* recorded again the continuing fascination that the border regions of the Old Southwest had always held for him. Once more he tried to analyze the conditions of the frontier and to understand the reasons for, and the uses of, the violence it produced. Along with personal reminiscences he told the stories of a few famous

² Thorpe, "Something About Cuba, Part 2," *Appleton's Journal*, II (August 21, 1869), 5.

duels. Recalling Lincoln's duel, which ended amicably, he praised Lincoln's humor as a practical mode of dealing with people but observed that Lincoln lacked the moral courage simply to refuse to fight.

He rejected the idea that a society practicing dueling produced more manly and courageous men. "When the late rebellion broke out our Southern cities were filled with professed and celebrated duelists. Their admirers expected from them brilliant deeds in war; we have no knowledge of their success." Finally he turned simply to religion to observe that dueling was plainly against the teaching of Christ.

For the next ten years he continued to write for *Harper's* from time to time. In 1869 he wrote several more articles, among them "Bob White," and "The Woodcock," discursive essays on hunting, nature, and the outdoor life. Other articles followed on the U. S. Post Office, the Treasury, the New York Harbor Defenses, competent feature articles all.

In October, 1872, he wrote a long article on Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War. Noting that Stanton had died a bitterly hated man, Thorpe set himself the task of discovering the reason. Stanton, Thorpe wrote, had certain infirmities of character which provoked animosity. While he was an honest man, patriotic and intelligent, he was often brusque in his manner. Further, Stanton was a sternly demanding, even a terrible taskmaster. He did not spare himself, and he would not spare others. Thorpe felt that the lack of ease and balance in Stanton's character arose from too passionate a dedication to work. Stanton never took time for recreation, Thorpe wrote. Consequently, his personality grew hard, craggy, bruising, lacking in forbearance and gentleness. Thorpe, in his consideration of Stanton's character, returned to the idea he had earlier expressed in the *Spirit* and elsewhere: that Americans were too often narrow and hard-driving. If they were to

take more time for cultural pursuits, for recreation, for outdoor sports and the like, they would become kinder, easier, better men. Thus whenever he considered his fellow citizens, on the frontier, in the South, or in the great cities of the East, Thorpe continued to grope for some experience or some method whereby the American character might become something nobler than it was.

3

After Thorpe's return to New York, he continued active in Republican politics. As a popular and effective speaker, he was much in demand by small organizations during local and national campaigns. Apparently he always supported the party candidate, always denounced the opposition, and could always be depended upon for amusing anecdotes and lively stories. For example, after Rutherford B. Hayes's nomination by the Republican National Convention at Cincinnati in 1876, Thorpe spoke for him at the July 2 meeting of the Brooklyn "Twenty-second Ward Hayes and Wheeler Club." The address seems ordinary enough workaday politics: he complained that the taxes of the Brooklyn and New York City administrations were ruinous, that many local Democrats had been rebels during the war, and that a Republican president was needed for four years longer to solve the problems left unsettled by the war.³

The next day Thorpe wrote Hayes, whom he did not know, to introduce himself as an old Whig-turned-Republican (like Hayes himself) and to denounce the Democrats as rebels.⁴ Thorpe's letter does not concern itself with issues or any other real substance. It seems to be an effort to call attention to his dependable work for the Republican party.

³ Brooklyn *Daily Argus*, July 3, 1876.

⁴ Original in the Rutherford B. Hayes Library, Fremont, Ohio.

Perhaps as a result of political connections he cultivated, perhaps as a reward for his constant political work, Thorpe attained, shortly after his return to New York from the South, the political sinecure he had long sought. His position was in the New York Customhouse, where he worked from 1869 until his death in 1878.

On July 2, 1869, he was given a place in the Office of Compilation of Statistics and Imports at a salary of \$1,400 per annum. In February, 1870, he was promoted to the Office of Clerk, Third Division, with salary increased to \$2,000. On August 12, 1871, Thorpe wrote a letter to William W. Belknap pointing out that certain abuses were then occurring in the customhouse and suggesting that he would welcome an appointment by Belknap to gather facts about the illegal practices.⁵ Apparently Thorpe received no such commission to carry out a reform, although the scandal was to become great.

In April, 1873, Thorpe was again promoted, this time to the position of Weigher, with a salary of \$2,500. Thorpe retained this place for over four and one-half years, until December 15, 1877, when he was removed. Two days later he submitted his own letter of resignation.⁶

Interestingly enough, within seven months (July, 1878) Thorpe was reappointed to a place in the customhouse, this time as Assistant Adjuster of Warehouse Bonds at a considerably reduced salary. Here he remained until his death.

4

A few months before his appointment to a place in the New York Customhouse, Thorpe wrote the first of many

⁵ Original in the National Archives.

⁶ Unfortunately neither letter is to be found among the Treasury Department records in the National Archives; consequently the ostensible reasons for Thorpe's removal and resignation are lost.

articles he was to do for *Appleton's Journal*. *Appleton's* was one of the best general magazines of its time, handsomely printed and illustrated. Edited by Oliver B. Bunce, the journal supplied a maturing American taste for variety of subject matter and intelligence in presentation.

Thorpe, as a writer of established reputation and dependable achievement, may well have been contacted by Bunce as *Appleton's* was being planned. The publishing house of D. Appleton and Company, which had brought out Thorpe's *Taylor Anecdote Book* and *The Hive of "The Bee-Hunter,"* published in the spring of 1869 a translation of L. Simonin's *Underground Life; or Mines and Miners*. Perhaps as a part of the promotion of the volume, Thorpe wrote an essay entitled "Underground Life; or Coal-Mines and Miners," praising Simonin's book and quoting from it frequently. Thorpe's essay was published as an illustrated supplement with separate pagination, to be bound in Volume I following the second number of the magazine, April 10, 1869. A similar lavishly illustrated essay by Thorpe, "Mines of Precious Metals," accompanied the May 22 *Appleton's* as an art supplement.

During the four years following the spring of 1869 Thorpe did some thirty articles for *Appleton's*. Many of them were short, casual essays to accompany the journal's handsome illustrations. Among the artists whose work *Appleton's* used were A. R. Waud, C. Cullen, Felix O. C. Darley, Granville Perkins, Harry Fenn, Winslow Homer, and others.

From *Appleton's* editorial interest in picturesque scenery grew one of the most sumptuous publishing ventures of the period. This was a pictorial work, issued in twenty art supplements, with illustrations by well-known artists and texts by good writers. William Cullen Bryant edited the series. The work was sold on subscription and, in 1872, was collected and bound in two immense volumes under the title *Picturesque America*. The book was another

phase of the discovery of the American scene, a joint work by authors and artists to illustrate and explain the physical setting of the new nation, with romantic emphasis on the unusual and the picturesque in the beauties of nature.

Many, but not all, of the articles first appeared in *Appleton's*. Waud, Cullen, Darley, Perkins, Fenn, A. F. Bellows, and J. F. Kensett numbered among the artists contributing to the work. The writers included Constance Fenimore Woolson, D. H. Strother, Oliver B. Bunce, Thorpe, and others. Bryant, in his preface, stated that the ambitious design of the work was "to present full descriptions of the scenery characteristic of all the different parts of our country." Indeed the handsome, stately volumes did a superb job of recording the nation's scenery.

Thorpe's first contribution was an essay entitled "St. John's and Ocklawaha Rivers" of Florida, which he described as he had seen them on a hunting trip. His observations about the Florida Crackers repeat to some extent the attitude he had expressed in his first published sketch, "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." Thorpe saw the Crackers' ragged existence from the point of view of an urbane and artistic observer, pleased with the quaint and the unusual:

But their hut was a very model of the picturesque, and the smouldering fire, over which their dinner-pot was cooking, sent up a wreath of blue smoke against the dark openings of the deep forest that gave a quiet charm and a contrast of colors, difficult to be sufficiently admired, and impossible to be conceived of in the mere speculations of studio-life.

Emphasis on the picturesque overbalances Thorpe's realistic powers of description throughout the article.

Thorpe's second essay for the collection was "The Lower Mississippi," which described the river as one would see it entering from the Gulf of Mexico and proceeding upstream. The scenes he described did not fit the popular

definition of the picturesque, and consequently his details are more realistically presented.

Thorpe's other work for *Appleton's Journal* repeated the pattern of his interests and his old loves. The South was honored in "The 'Levee' of New Orleans," in the spring of 1869, and again the following spring in "The Gardens of the South," a short sketch to accompany an illustration by A. R. Waud.

Thorpe's interest in outdoor sports appeared in articles entitled "Woman on Horseback," "Fishing off the Coast of New Jersey," "Bird Shooting on the Coast of New Jersey," "A Reminiscence of the Pine-woods of Maine," "Winter Sports on the Jersey Coast," and others. The essay on Maine included illustrations of the humorous American "characters" found in the little interior hamlets: the Landlord, the Village Oracle, the Loafer, the Guide, the Merchant, the Tramp, the Pioneer, etc.

The fascination of the Far West for Thorpe also found expression in his work for *Appleton's*. In August, 1869, he did a rambling little essay to accompany Darley's picture, "Emigrants Crossing the Plains." Then for the next year's January 1 issue he wrote a sketch to accompany an illustration titled "The Trapper's Christmas Carol." The bleak picture showed wolves howling in a waste of snow covering the trapper's cabin and all the barren landscape. Such genre work pleased Thorpe. He pointed out in his essay that the Western trappers were not always amiable and heroic but instead were often solitary or desperate men.

Then in *Appleton's* for August 13, 1870, appeared the first of four illustrated articles entitled "Glimpses of Indian Life." Thorpe wrote that some of the Indians' faults were "developed by the oppressions of the reckless selfishness of the white man," and that the Indians' virtues of courage and self-denial were worth a wise man's contem-

plation. But the series of illustrations for *Appleton's*, Thorpe continued, was designed to "depict the familiar, the humorous, and the unimaginative rather than the heroic side of Indian character." The accompanying illustrations pictured the Indian Dandy, in top hat with feathers, frock coat, and heroic whiskey bottle. Other pictures included "The Trading Post," "Women Water-Carriers," "Indian Women Bathing," and others. The third and fourth parts of the series showed the Indians hunting in animal disguises, fishing, and going about the other tasks of their daily life. While pleasantly and intelligently done, Thorpe's essays on Indian life seem largely derivative by 1870; they lack the freshness of vision of his earlier work.

His only effort at fiction for *Appleton's*, the last of his career, was "Bessie Black; or, the Undertaker's Courtship," which appeared August 7, 1869. The piece exhibits an amiable but rather grotesque humor of character. Its form is anecdotal, obviously a casual effort.

Thorpe's final few essays for *Appleton's* in 1872 and 1873 grow reminiscent in tone. His "New York Artists Fifty Years Ago" is more historical than personal, but through it shines the reflective mood. Thorpe devoted several paragraphs to the neglected painter John Quidor without, however, identifying Quidor as his own teacher. He wrote that Quidor was an artist of unusual ability and would have been a great success, but no market existed in America for his kind of work. Thorpe was right in his critical judgment, but Quidor had to wait another 70 years for his recognition.

"The Old Theatres of New York, 1750-1827" was again largely historical but still contained some personal recollections. The older theaters, Thorpe felt, surpassed their successors in holding "the mirror up to nature." Thorpe's final bit of history for *Appleton's* was a short account of the Van Rensselaer family to accompany an illustration,

"Manor of Rensselaerwyck." Most of Thorpe's work for *Appleton's* was highly competent feature journalism. As a writer he had dwindled somewhat from his early keenness of perception and individuality into a merely skillful professional.

5

After *Appleton's*, Thorpe's next close connection with a national magazine was with *Forest and Stream*. This journal first appeared in the late summer of 1873, edited by Charles Hallock. A superior weekly devoted to sports and the outdoor life, it was active in founding the Audubon Society and wielded an important influence in game conservation reforms. Its purpose, the editor wrote in the first issue, was "to studiously promote a healthful interest in outdoor recreation, and to cultivate a refined taste for natural objects." Thorpe wrote for the journal from its first issue, when the editor announced: "Our dramatic and art column will be prepared by Colonel T. B. Thorpe, and must at once become popular with all our readers who are interested in these matters."

Thorpe's column for the first issue of the new magazine was excellently done—casual, urbane, humorous, and showing nice discrimination of taste. He began in his opening column a small campaign for more appreciation of the grand opera. It was surprising, he observed, that a city as large as New York did not support the opera. He felt that the people in general, rather than the few, should be encouraged to attend and appreciate. In other essays he noted that ordinarily the audience at the opera was too busy looking uneasily around to see how it ought to conduct itself. Consequently it had no time to attend simply to its own reactions.⁷ By and by, Thorpe felt, the audience would relax and judge for itself.

⁷ "Art and Drama," *Forest and Stream*, I (October 16, 1873), 157-58.

Thorpe's taste for the opera may have been formed to some degree in New Orleans. In one of his columns he noted that the opera had long been the delight of the Creoles of the ancient Crescent City. "Our recollections of a grand night at the Opera House of New Orleans can never be effaced," he wrote, recalling the color and enthusiasm of the Creole audience—the old Spanish and French families—in an affectionate and appreciative reminiscence.⁸

Among the things Thorpe did not like in the New York theaters was the wretched "Black Crook," a combined play and spectacle at Niblo's. The performance, Thorpe felt, was a bad play and destructive of good taste. Thorpe was not the only critic to snipe at this puerile melodrama, but it remained immensely popular, according to the nature of such presentations.

In reforming the taste of New York theater-goers, Thorpe felt that the *opéra bouffe* promised success. It occupied a middle ground between the grand opera and the best efforts of the Negro minstrel companies. He hoped that it would become permanently popular. In the fall of 1873 he reviewed the Broadway Theatre's *opéra bouffe*. The company, he wrote, was in fair vocal power and carefully trained. The music he found not so "fresh" as Offenbach's, but in all the performance was quite pleasing.⁹

His greatest enthusiasm, however, was reserved for what he called the "old English" tragedies and comedies, meaning the dramatic work of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. He wrote in the fall of 1873 that tragedy had for a long time been banished from New York, but at Wallack's the best of the old English comedies had long been presented: "Here was a green spot, where the intelligent and cultured lover of the drama could find an evening's entertainment, be pleased throughout the performance, and go home with the consciousness of having spent an

⁸ *Ibid.* (November 6, 1873), 221-22.

⁹ *Ibid.* (September 4, 1873), 62.

hour or two in the most satisfactory recreation." ¹⁰ Thorpe's column recalled the pleasant scenes of the audiences at Wallack's settling themselves. Now however, he lamented, the offering at Wallack's was changing: in place of the old comedies the theater was offering movement, "gorgeous attire, and splendid scenery." But lamentable as this was, "echo answers back, 'it pays to succumb,' and the manager's conscience is at rest." The best stage, he felt, is that where "the mirror is held up to nature in its highest developments." ¹¹

Among the plays Thorpe praised during 1873 and 1874 when he was writing for *Forest and Stream* were "Othello," "A School for Scandal," "She Stoops to Conquer," and "A New Way to Pay Old Debts." These he admired, but he observed that dramatic fashion was changing from a focus of attention on the play and on character to a focus on scenery and spectacle. Family recreation was becoming a problem. A refined and cultured family, he wrote, had increasingly fewer places to go to for dramatic entertainment in the city; everywhere it would be offended by the "bad taste and scenic displays" of the productions. The increasing richness of display seemed to Thorpe to be accompanied by an increasing poverty of mind.¹²

Thorpe's weekly column devoted considerably more time to the drama than to art. However, from time to time he would review the exhibitions of the city or comment on individual artists. In December, 1873, he reviewed the Brooklyn Art Exhibition and praised Emanuel Leutze's monumental *Washington at Monmouth* for its fine drawing and skillful massing of detail.

Occasional references in the columns also indicate that Thorpe was an active clubman. He attended meetings and exhibitions of the Brooklyn Art Association both before and

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (September 11, 1873), 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.* (September 25, 1873), 110.

¹² *Ibid.* (December 11, 1873), 285.

after the Civil War. He was a skillful and eager chess player. He seems to have been active with the New York Veterans of the Mexican War and other like organizations.¹³ One of the *Forest and Stream* columns records meeting the English novelist Wilkie Collins at the Lotos Club, where Thorpe was offended by the introductory speech of one Mr. Bradlaugh. All together, Thorpe's writing in the 1870's records a busy social and a broad and vigorous intellectual life.

Just how much Thorpe wrote for *Forest and Stream* is not clear from a reading of the journal today. The last column readily identifiable as his appeared January 8, 1874. However, March 22, 1877, the magazine printed a list of its contributors, and Thorpe was included among them. If his column were stopped early in 1874, as it appears, he probably quit writing it of his own accord. He seems to have been of a restless temperament moved by enthusiasm and quite willing to end any enterprise that began to bore him.

6

Another of Thorpe's magazine connections during these years was with the curious but well-paying little *Baldwin's Monthly*, which was "Published by Baldwin the Clothier, N. E. Cor. Canal and Broadway, and given away to the people." Under no obligation to please anybody but his customers, O. C. Baldwin was as free to patronize minor literary artists as a Renaissance prince. He published work by such unusual writers as Walt Whitman, Paul Hamilton Hayne, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith, wife of Seba Smith of the Jack Downing letters. Of the enterprise Mrs. Smith wrote in her autobiography that it "was conducted in a

¹³ See Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, September 24, 1878.

fine manly way by Mr. Baldwin, who paid reasonable prices for his articles." ¹⁴

Thorpe's first work for *Baldwin's*, December, 1875, was a tribute to his friend Lewis Gaylord Clark, former editor of the *Knickerbocker*, who had just died. Thorpe also wrote Clark's obituary for *Harper's*, his last work for that journal.

Thorpe's next project for *Baldwin's Monthly* was a series of fifteen articles, beginning November, 1875, under the general title "Painters of the Century." The first four of these comprised a history of the National Academy of Design. The fifth was titled "Wit and Humor of the Early Portrait Painters." Thorpe wrote that the early painters were often remarkable for their "fluency in speech, their happy manner of description and story-telling." Stuart, Jarvis, Inman, Chester Harding and others Thorpe recalled as easy and witty conversationalists.

The following essays in the series were devoted to Jervis McEntee, S. J. Guy, Cole, Elliott, Audubon, and others. In his essay for May, 1877, he praised Eastman Johnson's *Old Kentucky Home*, which he recalled having first seen at the National Academy of Design exhibition in 1859. Thorpe wrote that he tried to buy the painting for a friend in Louisiana, but before the arrangements could be made Governor Wright of New Jersey [perhaps William P. Wright] had purchased it. He remembered the pleasant picture and the South itself, still in the agony of its own reconstruction, with an old nostalgia: "When the kindly influences of time shall have softened the asperities of the present hour. . . ." he wrote, such pictures as Johnson's would be all that remained of the Old South.

In September, 1878, appeared "American Pictures," Thorpe's last essay for *Baldwin's*. A few weeks earlier his year-old grandson, Freddie Dickman, died. Then the child's

¹⁴ Mary Alice Wyman, *Two American Pioneers* (New York, 1927), 224-25.

mother, Thorpe's daughter Dordie Rebecca, died. She was only twenty-five years old.

Thorpe himself had long suffered from chronic Bright's Disease. The two deaths in his family were a painful shock to him. Shortly he himself was taken to New York's Roosevelt Hospital. On September 20 it was apparent that he could not live. That day he made his will to dispose of only modest property. He made first provision for his unmarried daughter Lulie and then stipulated that his personal property should be divided among his children. He directed that his many pictures "be divided equally as near as may be without sale between my children. . . ." At the time his living children were his daughter Anna Saunders, wife of Frederick Saunders, Jr., the Reverend Thomas May Thorpe, Episcopal minister at Hot Springs, Arkansas, and his young daughter Lulie M. Thorpe.

Then about four o'clock in the afternoon of September 20, 1878, Thomas Bangs Thorpe died.

Most of the metropolitan newspapers and many of the national magazines carried obituaries, some of them quite long and full. Thorpe would have been pleased to know that both *Forest and Stream* and the odd little *Baldwin's* called him a "true gentleman of the old school." "Will Wildwood," writing for the latter journal in praise of Thorpe's many enthusiasms, his kindliness, and his love of America, North and South, said that he exhibited in all he did "that sympathy which maketh all mankind akin."

A Bibliography of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's Works

NO STORY OF THE LIFE OF THOMAS BANGS THORPE (1815-1878)—artist, journalist, and humorist of the Old Southwest—can be concluded without a complete bibliography¹ of his writings—a list of works that may be useful to students of frontier humor and realism and to historians of American art, journalism, and sports.

His literary accomplishments reflect brightly many of the intellectual currents of his age; his comments on all areas of life are spiced with honesty and good humor. At his best, as originator of the "Big Bear of Arkansas," he displays an originality and special talent in molding the tradition of Western writing.

Two items sometimes attributed to Thorpe need comment. The content of *A Voice to America* seems not to be Thorpe's in either substance or style. His name on the title page of the third edition represents, apparently, his momentary flirting with the Know-Nothing party after the defeat of the Whigs in Louisiana in 1854, a defeat that meant the end of his own political ambitions in the South. Next, from Allibone to the *Dictionary of American Biography*, the novel *Lynde Weiss* has

¹ This bibliography first appeared in *American Literature*, XXIX (May, 1957), 171-79, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the editors.

been attributed to Thorpe. Richard Walser has established recently that the real author was George H. Throop, whose name, indeed, appears on the title page.²

A. BOOKS

The Mysteries of the Backwoods; or Sketches of the Southwest: Including Character, Scenery, and Rural Sports. By T. B. Thorpe, Author of "Tom Owen the Bee-Hunter," &c. With illustrations by Felix O. C. Darley. Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846.

Our Army on the Rio Grande. Being a Short Account of the Important Events Transpiring from the Time of the Removal of the "Army of Occupation" from Corpus Christi, to the Surrender of Matamoros; with Descriptions of the Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, the Bombardment of Fort Brown, and the Ceremonies of the Surrender of Matamoros: With Descriptions of the City, etc. etc. Illustrated by Twenty-Six Engravings. By T. B. Thorpe, Author of "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter"; "Mysteries of the Back Woods," etc. Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846.

Our Army at Monterey. Being a Correct Account of the Proceedings and Events which Occurred to the "Army of Occupation" Under the Command of Major General Taylor, from the Time of Leaving Matamoros to the Surrender of Monterey with a Description of The Three Days' Battle and the Storming of Monterey: The Ceremonies Attending the Surrender: Together with the Particulars of the Capitulation. Illustrated by a View of the City, and a Map Drawn by Lieut. Benjamin, USA. By T. B. Thorpe, Author of "Our Army on the Rio Grande," "Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter," etc. Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847.

The Taylor Anecdote Book. Anecdotes and Letters of Zachary Taylor. By Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848.

The Hive of "The Bee-Hunter," A Repository of Sketches, Including Peculiar American Character, Scenery, and Rural Sports. By T. B. Thorpe, of Louisiana. Author of "Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter"; "Mysteries of the Backwoods," etc. etc. Illustrated by Sketches from Nature. New-York: D. Appleton and Company, M.DCCC.LIV.

The Master's House; A Tale of Southern Life. By Logan.

² "The Mysterious Case of George Higby Throop, 1818-1896; Or, The Search for the Author of the Novels *Nag's Head*, *Bertie*, and *Lynde Weiss*," *North Carolina Review*, XXXIII (January, 1956), 12-44.

Illustrated by Drawings from Nature. New York: T. L. McElrath & Company, 1854.

A Voice to America; or, The Model Republic, Its Glory or Its Fall: With a Review of the Decline and Failure of the Republics of South America, Mexico, and of the Old World; Applied to the Present Crisis in the United States. By Frederick Saunders. New York: E. Walker, 1855. [The third edition of the book, also published by E. Walker in 1855, lists Thomas B. Thorpe as joint author. The preface states the book was written by a group of gentlemen. It is impossible to tell what Thorpe's contribution was, if anything other than his name or some editorial assistance.³]

Reminiscences of Charles L. Elliott, Artist. By Col. T. B. Thorpe. Published to Meet the Demand Not Supplied by the Regular Editions of the "Evening Post." n.d., n.p. [The pamphlet contains eleven double-column pages.]

B. MAGAZINE PIECES

"Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter," *Spirit*, IX, 247 (July 27, 1839).⁴

"Wild Turkey Shooting," *Spirit*, X, 253 (Aug. 1, 1840).

"Primitive Forests of the Mississippi," *Spirit*, X, 361 (Oct. 3, 1840).

"A Frontier Incident," *Spirit*, X, 409 (Oct. 31, 1840).

³In 1864 appeared another book which may be mentioned here: *Debates in the Convention for the Revision and Amendment of the Constitution of the State of Louisiana*. New Orleans: W. R. Fish, Printer to the Convention, 1864. The volume contains many debates and addresses delivered by Thorpe, who was a member of the convention. He had returned to New Orleans with the Federal forces under the command of General Benjamin Butler, taken up residence there, and been elected by the voters of one of the city districts to represent them at the convention.

⁴*Spirit* will serve to identify the New York *Spirit of the Times*. For discussions of the journal, see Franklin J. Meine (ed.), *Tall Tales of the Southwest 1830-1860* (New York, 1930); Constance Rourke, *American Humor* (New York, 1931); Walter Blair, *Native American Humor* (New York, 1937); Carvel Collins, "The Spirit of the Times," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, XL, 164-168 (1946); and Norris Yates, "The *Spirit of the Times*: Its Early History and Some of Its Contributors," Separate from the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, XLVIII, 1-32 (Second Quarter, 1954). The most complete study in Norris Yates, *William T. Porter and the Spirit of the Times* (Baton Rouge, 1957).

- "The Mississippi," *The Knickerbocker Magazine*, XVI, 161-164 (Dec., 1840).
- "Sporting in Louisiana," *Spirit*, X, 571 (Jan. 30, 1841).
- "The Big Bear of Arkansas," *Spirit*, XI, 43-44 (March 27, 1841).
- "Woodcock Fire Hunting," *Spirit*, XI, 103 (May 1, 1841).
- "An Extra Deer Hunt in Louisiana," *Spirit*, XI, 223 (July 10, 1841).
- "Cook-A-Doo-Dle-Doo," *Spirit*, XI, 247 (July 24, 1841).
- "Old Dutch Houses and Their Associations," *The Knickerbocker Magazine*, XVIII, 150-155 (Aug., 1841).⁵
- "Scenes on the Mississippi," *Spirit*, XI, 319-320 (Sept. 4, 1841).
- "The First Hunting Trip of the Steamer 'Nimrod,'" *Spirit*, XI, 331 (Sept. 11, 1841).
- "A Piano in Arkansas," *Spirit*, XI, 409-410 (Oct. 30, 1841).
- "Opossums and 'Possum Hunting," *Spirit*, XI, 469 (Dec. 4, 1841).
- "A Storm Scene on the Mississippi," *Spirit*, XII, 43-44 (March 26, 1842).
- "Romance of the Woods," *Spirit*, XII, 61 (April 9, 1842).
- "The Disgraced Scalp-Lock," *Spirit*, XII, 229-230 (July 16, 1842).
- "The American Wildcat," *New Sporting Magazine*, London, N. S., IV, 58-61 (July, 1842).⁶
- "The Devil's Summer Retreat, in Arkansas," *Spirit*, XII, 295-296 (Aug. 20, 1842).
- "Place de la Croix," *The Knickerbocker Magazine*, XX, 364-370 (Oct., 1842).
- "A Defense of Woodcock Fire Hunting," *Spirit*, XII, 386 (Oct. 15, 1842).
- "The Louisiana Law of Cock Fighting," *Spirit*, XIII, 3 (March 13, 1843).
- "Louisiana Bears and Bear Hunting," *Spirit*, XIII, 73 (April 15, 1843).
- "The Way to Kill Wild Turkeys and Rheumatism," *Spirit*, XIII, 253 (July 29, 1843).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 303 (Aug. 26, 1843).⁷
- ⁵ The title of this article is followed by Thorpe's name spelled "Thorp," the form his father and he himself ordinarily used. Apparently William Trotter Porter began adding the *e* in the *Spirit*, and Thorpe continued the practice in his books and in most of his published articles.
- ⁶ Reprinted in America in *American Turf Register*, XIII, 518-521 (Sept., 1842).
- ⁷ This excellent series of burlesques appeared originally in the *Louisiana Concordia Intelligencer*, of which Thorpe was part owner and editor. Apparently no complete files of the paper are extant.

- "Sir William Drummond Stewart's Hunting Expedition in the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 333 (Sept. 9, 1843).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 356 (Sept. 23, 1843).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 392 (Oct. 14, 1843).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 405 (Oct. 21, 1843).
- "A Tall Hunt—Crack Shot—Big Meat," *Spirit*, XIII, 409 (Oct. 28, 1843).
- "Sporting Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 421 (Nov. 4, 1843).
- "Sporting Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 445 (Nov. 18, 1843).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 497 (Dec. 16, 1843).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 557 (Jan. 20, 1844).
- "The Way Americans Go Down Hill," *Spirit*, XIII, 560-561 (Jan. 20, 1844).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIII, 569 (Jan. 27, 1844).
- "Stoke Stout's Adventures with Mr. Stiggins' Bull," *Spirit*, XIII, 589 (Feb. 10, 1844).
- "Little Steamboats of the Mississippi," *Spirit*, XIV, 19 (March 9, 1844).
- "Letters from the Far West," *Spirit*, XIV, 33 (March 16, 1844).
- "Angling in Lake Concordia," *Spirit*, XIV, 140 (May 18, 1844).
- "Another Letter from Stoke Stout," *Spirit*, XV, 38 (March 22, 1845).
- "Extracts from a Familiar Epistle," *Spirit*, XV, 201 (June 28, 1845).
- "The Spectator and Simon Suggs," *Spirit*, XV, 471 (Nov. 29, 1845).
- "The Squatter's Wife," *Graham's Magazine*, XXIX, 299-301 (Dec., 1846).
- "The Chase," *Spirit*, XVI, 548 (Jan. 9, 1847).
- "Reminiscences of Sergeant [*sic*] Smith Prentiss," *Spirit*, XX, 283 (Aug. 3, 1850).
- "Incidents in the Life of Audubon," *Godey's Lady's Book*, XLII, 306-309 (May, 1851).
- "Sugar and the Sugar Regions of Louisiana," *Harper's*, VII, 746-767 (Nov., 1853).
- "The Case of Lady Macbeth Medically Considered, A Western Sketch," *Harper's*, VIII, 391-398 (Feb., 1854).
- "Cotton and Its Cultivation," *Harper's*, VIII, 447-463 (March, 1854).
- "General Taylor's Residence at Baton Rouge," *Harper's*, IX, 763-765 (Nov., 1854).

- "The Alligator," *Harper's*, X, 37-49 (Dec., 1854).
- "The Rattlesnake and Its Congeners," *Harper's*, X, 470-483 (March, 1855).
- "The Dog, Described and Illustrated," *Harper's*, X, 615-628 (April, 1855).
- "The Lion and His Kind," *Harper's*, X, 735-745 (May, 1855).
- "The History and Mystery of Tobacco," *Harper's*, XI, 1-18 (June, 1855).
- "Bears and Bear Hunting," *Harper's*, XI, 591-607 (Oct., 1855).
- "Remembrances of the Mississippi," *Harper's*, XII, 25-41 (Dec., 1855).
- "The Story of the Whale," *Harper's*, XII, 466-482 (March, 1856).
- "The Resurrection Flower," *Harper's*, XII, 619-620 (April, 1856).
- "The Gnawers," *Harper's*, XII, 756-763 (May, 1856).
- "Story of James P. Beckwourth," *Harper's*, XIII, 455-472 (Sept., 1856).
- "Something About the Horse," *Harper's*, XIII, 751-767 (Nov., 1856).
- "A Gigantic Centipede," *Harper's*, XIV, 29-31 (Dec., 1856).
- "Wheat and Its Associations," *Harper's*, XV, 301-313 (Aug., 1857).
- "The American Deer: Its Habits and Associations," *Harper's*, XVII, 606-621 (Oct., 1858).
- "Reminiscences of Tom Owen the Bee Hunter," *Spirit*, XXIX, 30 (Feb. 26, 1859).
- "Honorable Alexander H. Stephens, of Georgia," *Spirit*, XXIX, 37-38 (March 5, 1859).
- "National Academy of Design, No. 1," *Spirit*, XXIX, 133-134 (April 30, 1859).
- "National Academy of Design, No. 2," *Spirit*, XXIX, 145 (May 7, 1859).
- "National Academy of Design, No. 3," *Spirit*, XXIX, 157 (May 14, 1859).
- "National Academy of Design, No. 4," *Spirit*, XXIX, 169 (May 21, 1859).
- "National Academy of Design, No. 5," *Spirit*, XXIX, 193 (June 4, 1859).
- "A Visit to 'John Brown's Tract,'" *Harper's*, XIX, 160-178 (July, 1859).
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- "Art Matters of the Century, No. XIII; The Lenox Contribution," *Baldwin's*, XIV, 1 (March, 1877).
- "Painters of the Century, No. XIV," *Baldwin's*, XIV, 1 (May, 1877).
- "Harper and Brothers," *Baldwin's*, XV, 1 (July, 1877).
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- "American Pictures," *Baldwin's*, XVII, 1 (Sept., 1878).

C. ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO COLLECTIONS

"Traditions of the Natchez," *The Knickerbocker Gallery: A Testimonial to the Editor of the Knickerbocker Magazine from its Contributors*. New York: Samuel Hueston, 1855, pp. 375-379. [This tribute to Lewis Gaylord Clark contains a portrait of Thorpe by C. L. Elliott, engraved by J. C. Buttre, facing p. 375.]

"The Lower Mississippi," in William Cullen Bryant (ed.), *Picturesque America*. 2 vols. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1872. [The set also reprinted his essay on "The St. John's and Oklawaha Rivers, Florida," from *Appleton's Journal*.]

D. NEWSPAPER WRITINGS

Concordia Intelligencer, Vidalia, Louisiana, June, 1843, to June, 1845. [The paper contains miscellaneous material written by Thorpe, not all of it readily identifiable. The "Letters from the Far West," originally appeared between the fall of

1843 and the spring of 1844. Among the extant copies are two of the letters, one in the issue for Nov. 25, 1843, and the other in the issue for Dec. 30, 1843. Both of these were later reprinted in the New York *Spirit of the Times*. "The Way Americans Go Down Hill" first appeared in the issue for Dec. 30, 1843, and was reprinted in *The Hive of the Bee Hunter* (1854).]

Daily Commercial Times, New Orleans, Louisiana, Nov. (?), 1845 to spring, 1846. [No copies were located for the period of Thorpe's editorship. In one of the November issues appeared "The Spectator and Simon Suggs," a review of Johnson Jones Hooper's *Adventures of Simon Suggs*.]

Daily Tropic, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1, 1846, to Sept., 1846. [On June 6, 1846, appeared the first of a series of dispatches on the Mexican War from Thorpe, who traveled to Port Isabel and Matamoros to visit the scenes of Taylor's victories of the eighth and ninth of May.]

Louisiana Conservator, Baton Rouge, Nov. (?), 1846, to the spring or summer of 1847. [No copies of this paper have been located. In it first appeared "The Chase," reprinted in the *Spirit*, Jan. 9, 1847, which also reprinted from Thorpe's paper on May 15, 1847, and following the reports of the races at the Baton Rouge Magnolia Course for the spring season of 1847.]

Daily National, New Orleans, Louisiana, June, 1847, to Dec. 10, 1847. [A bound volume of this paper from Sept. 10, 1847, to Dec. 30, 1847, was examined. Most of the original work in it is apparently Thorpe's. A hunting sketch, "Enemy in Front and Rear," first appeared here Oct. 6. 1847.]

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